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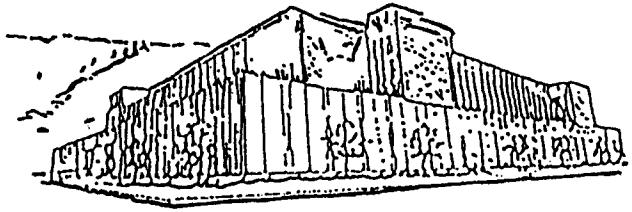
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COFFEE, CONSUMERISM, AND CONSERVATION:
AN ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
OF THE SUSTAINABLE COFFEE MOVEMENT

by

Alexandra V. Koelle

B.A. Oberlin College, 1994

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

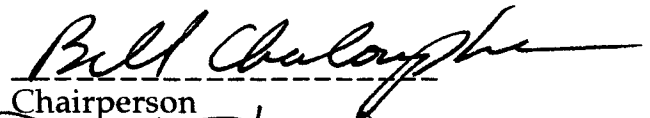
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Master of Science

The University of Montana

1998

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Coffee, Consumerism, and Conservation: An Environmental Discourse
Analysis of the Sustainable Coffee Movement (171 pp.)

Director: William Chaloupka *W.C.*

The sustainable coffee movement is spearheaded by U.S. environmentalists and focuses on Latin American coffee production. Its goals are to stop the technification of coffee plantations and to support the continued existence of shade-grown coffee. Technified coffee production is characterized by use of petrochemical fertilizers and pesticides, full-sun coffee trees, and no shade cover. Shade-grown coffee systems support high levels of biodiversity, require few chemical inputs, and usually are found on small-scale farms.

The sustainable coffee discourse focuses on the problem of biodiversity erosion without adequately considering the pressures and incentives responsible for the technification of coffee farms. The sustainable coffee movement designs its programs to save biodiversity on small-scale shaded farms but does not recommend major structural changes in large-scale, full-sun coffee plantations.

The sustainable coffee discourse marginalizes the central roles of global institutions in creating the economic policies that necessitate technification of coffee. The United States Agency for International Development funded coffee technification programs in Latin America in the 1970s, and continues to support programs for the "renovation" of shade coffee systems. The current debt structures and adjustment policies required of coffee-producing countries by the International Monetary Fund also determine the current trend towards technification. The sustainable coffee discourse does not mount a critique of the economic policies that necessitate optimizing yields over the environmental and social aspects of coffee production. In concentrating solely on maintaining shade plantations through market-based solutions, the sustainable coffee ignores structural changes that would transform coffee production to benefit small-scale farmers and the environment.

The sustainable coffee movement emphasizes consumption as a method of social or political action to the exclusion of other tactics. It concentrates on certification of coffee as shade-grown, sustainable, and organic as the most effective way to educate consumers and promote sustainable coffee. The sustainable coffee movement uncritically accepts the context of U.S. consumer society. It calls for fundamental changes in production methods, but does not address the increased consumption of the North with the same amount of scrutiny.

Acknowledgments

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Chapter One

Introduction

The Need For Environmental Discourse Analysis

The traditional American environmental discourse is based on the belief that there is an inherent border between “nature” and “culture.”¹ Nature is seen as timeless, as a delicate and diverse system that tends towards balance and harmony. Culture is positioned in counterpoint to this, and is often represented as an undifferentiated horde of humans scrambling to amass money or goods, consuming and progressing in a linear fashion. This view was instrumental in establishing wilderness areas to be forever protected from “humanity:” the idea of wilderness as “virgin” and “untouched by human hands” led to a successful movement for preservation. Yet its source of strength lay in the maintenance of a dualistic view that nature must be protected from encroaching culture.

This environmentalist belief has been criticized for its lack of attention to politics and differences within human societies.

When environmentalists identify rural people with nature (that is, as if they had no social history), these people are less able to fight for social justice. At its worst, the fight to save nature assumes the air of a religious mission in which almost any means is justified, since the goal is greater than mere human interests.²

In seeing “humans” as the root cause of environmental destruction, the classical environmentalist (who is often white and male) ignores power differences arising from race, gender, and First World/Third World inequality. These differences often determine who benefits from environmental degradation, and who bears the consequences.³ A redefinition of the American environmental

movement includes causes that can be construed as "environmental" but do not suffer from the internal tension that comes with a "wilderness versus civilization" perspective. Robert Gottlieb argues effectively that a concern for the environment has never been just about wilderness. He situates the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Conference as a starting point for a revision of the movement's philosophies and goals. He quotes Dana Alston, an organizer of the event:

For us... the issues of the environment do not stand alone by themselves. They are not narrowly defined. Our vision of the environment is woven into an overall framework of social, racial, and economic justice.⁴

This critique of mainstream environmental philosophy leads to a second one: the project of addressing the effects of the generic view of human society on environmental agendas. Ways of conceptualizing and making sense of phenomena have tangible effects on the world, and a view of humans as nature-threatening has at times led to destructive policies and agendas. The frequent assumption by many environmentalists that population growth in Latin America and Africa must be halted is one example of this. Significantly, such claims are supported more by a belief in ecological systems modeling (the ubiquitous chart showing population growth) than by attention to historical contexts of resource use, poverty, or political situations.

Such a mentality often produces an insensitivity to human suffering or political conflict. This attitude can be seen in popular Malthusian environmental discourse: bumperstickers that read "Save the Planet: Kill Yourself," and the callous, though common, statements that AIDS and war will solve a "population crisis." Within the arena of policy and global politics, Northern and white environmentalists have been criticized at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 and

elsewhere by Third World environmentalists. Some activists "have staked out a 'Third World' perspective in criticizing American environmentalists for their inattention to livelihood issues."⁵

An analysis of the discourse of environmental movements includes the repositioning of the movement within a specific society, and asks environmentalists to give up claims to moral superiority. Most significantly, such projects, while problematizing seemingly simple situations, create a new space for movements that are effective because they view problems in their complexity, rather than simplifying and obscuring what is at stake.

In order to identify discourses and their effects on policy and action, it is necessary to highlight the connection between discourse and practice; to demonstrate that discourse is not a separate system of signs removed from the tangible world. Discourses determine how reality is made intelligible and apparent. In her astute analysis of the conservation biology work of Michael Soule, Anna Tsing notes that

Discourse is a polysemous term; most people assume at first that environmental discourse refers to "discussion" or "rhetoric," that is, the terms and expressions through which we refer to environmental topics. Rhetoric is one aspect of the discourses to which I refer, but it is not the whole thing. Environmental discourses are fields of practice and complexes of technology in which knowledge is made; ways of speaking are only one kind of knowledge produced in them. Discourse refers us to a project within which particular categories make sense.⁶

To speak within a certain discourse without understanding its role in truth-production is to take the categories with which it constitutes phenomena as inherently existing in the world. It is only a small step from interpreting a reality in this manner to acting upon the belief in it. To assume that certain categories "naturally" exist in the world is to open up the possibility for engaging in well-

intentioned, though often misdirected action. This is especially the case in programs designed in First World countries for the benefit of less-developed places. One example of this is how the international development apparatus responded to the criticism that it had not taken women into account in designing its programs. Writing about the "Women in Development" initiatives of the 1970s, Escobar shows that "conceiving of peasants as 'food producers' fragments peasant lives according to a compartmentalization that rural people do not experience and that they resist."⁷ When we look at how certain categories are constructed, and become aware of how they operate and effect our view of the world, the likelihood of destructive interventions lessens.

The practice of discourse analysis has been the subject of misinterpretation and attack by some environmental activists and others, who see it as having the potential to become fodder for the cause of anti-environmentalists.⁸ Traditional conservationists have argued that if unadulterated nature is presented as a fiction and humans have always interacted with their environment, then the case for wilderness preservation is fundamentally weakened.

Alongside the continuing strength of the idea of wilderness as pure, other environmental categories have risen in prominence as transcendental indicators of value. These are significant because they are readily incorporated into the concepts underlying the preservationist agenda. One such shift has been towards a reification of the abstract idea of "biodiversity" conservation, the belief that maintaining genetic diversity of plant and animal life is of utmost importance. It is often presented as a race against time. An alarmist tone pervades the biodiversity discourse and routinely highlights frightening statistics of genetic depletion.⁹ This was not, however, always the environmental emergency seen as the most pressing. Rather, the methods and subjects of certain sciences made it

possible to frame problems in this way. The advances made in the fields of microbiology, computer modeling, and satellite photography allow us, for the first time, to conceptualize of the world as an information source and a code. The metaphor of the planet and living things as repositories of information has become a powerful narrative and truth-claim.¹⁰ It is necessary to scrutinize how biodiversity became the determining environmental concept of the 1990s, replacing the once primary goal of land preservation. Such analysis is neither pro- nor anti-species preservation. It is, however, strongly in favor of explicit understandings of how meanings shift, the better ultimately to strategize those shifts.

It is deceptively easy to fall into the position of claiming scientific neutrality: how can the efforts to save species from extinction be anything but laudable? Yet there is a conceptual step missing here that is glossed over in the biodiversity conservation rhetoric: to observe that species are declining in number does not lead inevitably to speaking for them, to a call for preservation. An unacknowledged logical step is missing.¹¹ It is vital, however, to trace how this occurred, to have an awareness of how one comes to value what one does. It also de-naturalizes “biodiversity” and thus weakens its role as a moral imperative.

Some critics and biologists such as Vandana Shiva and Donna Haraway have highlighted the connection between biodiversity conservation and genetic prospecting by bioengineering and pharmaceutical companies. They show that attention given to genetic makeup relies on a narrative that views the world, and especially its tropical regions, as a vast gene “bank.” If environmentalists uncritically support biodiversity conservation, especially those programs increasingly funded by multilateral lending agencies, the chance for their efforts playing to the interests of private interests and global capital become greater.

This has happened with ethnobotanical research, which seeks to understand indigenous people's uses of forest plants in Southeast Asia and South America. Increasingly, bioprospecting companies patent plant and human genetic material for private profit-- a direction which Shiva calls the Second Coming of Columbus: "The colonies have now been extended to the interior spaces, the 'genetic codes' of life-forms from microbes and plants to animals, including humans."¹²

The placing of biodiversity conservation over the well-being of human communities can further position environmentalist projects against local communities. This is especially relevant for American environmental projects seeking to change situations in other countries. An awareness of environmental narratives is vital here; the metaphor of "gene bank" is telling. Charles Zerner, in his analysis of the narratives of two biodiversity conservation megaprojects, writes:

Forests are transformed into potential commodities... and the conservation mission may become linked to extractive enterprises. Nature is analogized to a warehouse, a library, or a safe-deposit box containing fixed, valuable, and threatened commercial assets... In the wake of mercantilist metaphors, development scenarios authorize interventions to secure these assets for world markets, national governments, and the private sector.¹³

Now that environmental conservation has become a project of the World Bank, an institution which has wreaked havoc on entire countries by funding projects without regard to their environmental consequences, we must reexamine the assumptions and motivations of this movement. Environmentalism has privileged action over discussion for too long, and has historically been weak on theory and analysis. Stepping back and analyzing environmental discourses, Tsing argues, "draws us away from essential group mentalities toward the specificity of particular projects; within a given project,

we can study how environmental objects and knowledges are produced and disseminated."¹⁴

We can see how discourse analysis works if we consider a specific situation, rather than arguing abstractly about its value. The sustainable coffee movement is a particularly interesting project: it is situated at a number of nature-culture intersections, is spearheaded by U.S. environmentalists and focused on Latin American areas, and is significantly informed by biodiversity conservation narratives. What we see is that although the goals, strategies, marketing, and self-understanding of the sustainable coffee promoters seems transparent at first glance, they actually contain exclusions and promotions that have implications for how the larger environmental movement approaches politics.

The Case of Coffee Production

When the coffee plant was introduced into Latin America at the end of the seventeenth century, it was initially cultivated on large plantations. As Latin American countries gained independence, the colonial era plantations dwindled, and many large-scale coffee farms could not afford to pay for labor and manage their vast acreage. Yet the late 19th century also saw an export boom that put the best lands into commodity producers' hands. Around the same time as the demise of the coffee *fincas* and the rise of export agriculture in places such as the Guatemalan coast, El Salvador, Brazil, and Nicaragua, indigenous small-scale farmers incorporated coffee trees into their land, where they grew them among other crops, fruit trees, and fuelwood. Sometimes coffee trees were planted into existing backyard agroforestry systems; more often they were located away from homes in the uplands. Coffee is not a "subsistence" crop, and small-scale farmers

must also grow a staple grain. Usually they alternate between two systems, often lowland rice and corn with upland coffee, since coffee needs altitude and coolness. This form of coffee cultivation remains widespread today, especially in northern Latin America.

While the old-time plantation system no longer exists, coffee is once again being farmed on large farms with indigenous labor comprising the bulk of the workforce. Today, the working conditions on large plantations remain similar to the days of forced labor, with wages as low as \$2 a day not uncommon.¹⁵

However, a substantial amount of the coffee beans exported from Latin American countries originate from small landholdings tended by families. There are no exact statistics available on exactly how much coffee originates from small-scale farms, but the percentage of small farms is much greater in Mexico and Central America than in Colombia and other parts of South America.

Much of the coffee grown on these family farms is organic by default, simply because peasants cannot afford to buy chemical inputs due to the difficulty of gaining access to credit. Further, such coffee is not a monocrop. It is grown as part of a multistoried and polyculture system that provides the families with subsistence crops as well. These farming methods attract biodiversity and conserve the soil, but the intricacies of getting coffee to market and the necessity of dealing with middlemen prevent the grower from getting paid higher prices for the beans. Small-scale growers typically receive less than \$1 per pound of coffee harvested.

The small growers are vulnerable to price changes and stock market fluctuations over which they have no control. Yet coffee is the world's second most traded commodity after petroleum, and supplies Guatemala, Colombia, and El Salvador with as much as 44% of their export income.¹⁶ But the tremendous wealth generated by the international coffee trade-- from storage,

shipping, roasting, marketing, and retailing-- is never seen by the growers. In Mexico, sixty percent of coffee producers live in extreme poverty.¹⁷ They are also poor because most of them live in the mountains year-round or seasonally, and did not benefit from Green Revolution programs.

During the Green Revolution in the early 1970s, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) spent \$80 million in Latin America to promote a conversion to "modern" coffee production. USAID still funds programs aimed at coffee technification, although it now supports initiatives for maintaining shade production systems as well.¹⁸ Technification programs typically include new strains of coffee that mature faster, yield more fruit, and grow in full sun rather than under a canopy of several tree species. Central to these methods is the use of fertilizers and pesticides. While the official reason given for this aid was that it sought to encourage "development" and alleviate poverty, the motivation included benefits to the United States, in the form of consultants, chemical company subsidies, and higher yields for Northern markets.¹⁹

Currently an average of approximately 40% of the coffee plantations in Mexico, the Caribbean, Colombia and Central America are "technified."²⁰ This ratio continues to increase as debt-ridden countries are told by the IMF to prioritize production increases of coffee for export income. Individual farmers and landholders have similar incentives to modernize their plantations, because "technified coffee" yields more per unit area and requires less labor during planting and maturation of the cherries. But technification requires petrochemical inputs, and farmers must give up other products grown in accordance with agroforestry, multistory systems when converting to sun plantations.

The Sustainable Coffee Movement

Recent environmental concern about the consequences of sun-grown coffee began when research carried out by North American scientists in the mid-1990s showed that migratory birds were largely absent from modern plantations.²¹ These studies were a follow-up to initial research carried out in the 1930s by an ornithologist from the American Museum of Natural History, who found that the shade cover used in coffee plantations provided suitable habitat to birds and other wildlife. Studies during the 1970s and '80s also showed that there was a marked difference in bird population levels in shade and sun plantations.²²

The most recent findings report that in technified coffee farms, overall biodiversity-- of insects, vertebrates, and plants-- was alarmingly low when compared to traditional plantations.²³ Since traditional, shade-grown coffee does not require chemicals or necessitate deforestation, increasingly the terms "traditional agroforestry," "shade grown," and to some extent "organic" all point to overlapping, though not identical, production methods.

Essentially, the continued conversion to modern coffee production is linked to deforestation, water pollution, and soil depletion. This is especially alarming to environmentalists because so much forest has been lost in Central America already due to conversion to pasture and other cash crops. In El Salvador, sixty percent of the remaining forested land is under traditional coffee cultivation.²⁴ Due to market pressures and other incentives to modernize, these forested coffee farms are threatened with conversion to sun-grown, monoculture areas. Along with a large biodiversity loss and a decrease in habitat for migratory birds, water quality and human health will continue to be impacted significantly if the trend towards technification is not slowed or halted.

Why Analyze the Sustainable Coffee Movement?

The promotion of organic and other "sustainable" coffees has produced a voluminous literature, an increased awareness of coffee cultivation in consuming countries, and new projects aimed at growers in Latin America. The discourse of this movement subscribes to categories that are at the center of how reality is increasingly being construed by scientists, development specialists, and many NGOs. The cause of "environmentally friendly" coffee appears to be well-intentioned. The way in which its advocates frame their solutions, however, also obscures the United States' foreign aid history and our economic and consumer interests. The recent flurry of articles and other promotions of sustainable coffee often operate in a narrow context, divorced from history, patterns of consumption, and economic realities without which a discussion of coffee is incomplete. Such decontextualization is dangerous, because it can have the effect of replicating, and relying on, many of the assumptions that substantiate power dynamics between the North and the South.

The relevance of the sustainable coffee discourse lies in its involvement in three main areas, which it engages in ways I seek to "unpack:" the high value it places on biodiversity, its treatment of the role of development in conserving nature, and the role it accords to consumers of coffee in bringing about change.

I have already begun to discuss the rise in attention paid to biodiversity conservation in the context of explaining environmental discourse analysis. In Chapter Two, I take a closer look at the power of the biodiversity conservation mission and trace its effects on the shape of programs imagined and implemented. Initiatives formed to improve coffee production to benefit environmental health need to be placed in a context within the larger arena of

biodiversity conservation, which "have become major priorities among multilateral lending agencies. A large institutional apparatus is establishing itself as the primary agent for many forms of environmental intervention."²⁵ To what extent are the sustainable coffee goals aligned with, or in opposition to, globalizing forces and increased commodification of life forms?

Why analyze an environmental movement that is emerging in contrast to the older movements which concerned themselves primarily with "saving pristine nature" from human intervention? Increasingly, conservationists are trying to pinpoint specific practices that may be environmentally damaging, rather than broadly decrying all human activity in nature. I chart the conceptual process that led to "sustainable coffee" as the solution to a situation; to how the site of production is targeted as the area in need of a certain reform, and the site of consumption as needing another type of change. In Chapter Three, I explore whether the sustainable coffee discourse questions the international fiscal policies and the role of First World governments that created and maintain the present relation between consumption and production.

The sustainable coffee movement's goal is to maintain the economic viability of shade coffee agroecosystems in order to save habitat for migratory birds and biodiversity. Its projects include making credit available to small-scale farmers, offering premiums on certified coffee, and forging "partnerships" with coffee growing cooperatives in order to enable them to resist the lure of technification. These programs all culminate with a reliance on marketing tactics: consumers in the United States are called upon to purchase certified shade-grown coffee at a premium. Coffee drinkers in the United States are asked to "vote with their wallet" for Latin American biodiversity conservation. The sustainable coffee movement envisions a private-sector solution to the problem of technification and thus does not try to effect change in the political realm; it

ignores the influence of the IMF and the interests of the United States in the current trend towards technification.

As such, the discourse of the sustainable coffee movement locates its recommendations for change under the rubric of "sustainable development." A catch-all term, "sustainable development" promoters approach conservation (especially of biodiversity and tropical forests) in tandem with the economic development of the region in question. This idea rests on the belief that poverty can only be alleviated through increased global economic integration.

"Sustainable development" has been criticized both in theory and because of its possible material consequences. Philip McMichael writes that

management of the world's natural environment, on which human life itself depends, would pass to a technical and bureaucratic elite accountable to no one. Given its past and current practices, which are both unrepresentative and favor global over local actors in managing the world's natural resource base, the global elite's conception of sustainable development has all the makings of an oxymoron.²⁶

In this thesis I analyze the sustainable coffee movement within the framework of "sustainable development." In believing that environmental conservation needs to be paired with modernization of marketing techniques and certification for consumer appeal, the sustainable coffee movement sees global economic conditions as the answer to, rather than the cause of, the social inequities and environmental degradation of modern coffee production.

The sustainable coffee movement focuses the bulk of its programs on indigenous coffee growers, and asserts that they will unanimously benefit from certification and the promotion of shade-grown coffee. 25 million people work in coffee plantations in the world; in Latin America sixty percent of them are indigenous.²⁷ I concentrate on the sustainable coffee discourse's representation of indigenous people in my analysis because they form the bulk of coffee laborers,

and because First World projects portray them in simplistic ways. Two narratives frequently vie for dominance in Northern debates:

Are indigenous peoples the original ecologists, the true guardians of natural sustainability, or are they small-scale environmental destroyers, just waiting to increase their populations and get their hands on more powerful tools to ravage nature?²⁸

I explore if issues regarding poverty and food security are simply tacked on, or if they form an integral part of the sustainable coffee movement's concerns. To what extent are the assumptions of developmentalist paradigms included in this discourse?

In Chapter Four, I address the sustainable coffee movement's position in pursuing change through consumer activism. Despite gestures to alternatives, the positions taken by sustainable coffee promoters suggest the pattern of exclusions typical of contemporary capitalism. This is the case especially in the discourse of the marketers, roasters, and retailers of sustainable coffee. They have little to say about the roles of governments and international institutions in causing the economic and political conditions that lead to technification. Their literature is devoid of mention of the possibility for change in the political, rather than technical or commercial, sphere.

They ignore that questions of power and politics are integral to coffee production. The goal of "sustainability" is represented as one that can be met through technological change (matching producers of shade-grown coffee with consumers more efficiently through certification and niche marketing) and innovation rather than through political avenues. Such a stance within environmental movements signals environmentalist discourses' integration with modernization and economic paradigms. Rather than mounting an effective

critique of the root causes of environmental destruction, the sustainable coffee movement views capital, technical expertise and monitoring, and global trade as the solutions to the degradation of nature. The problem with this approach is that it hides the social and political inequities that are a direct consequence of the institutions that now profess to monitor and protect biodiversity. The efforts to conserve Latin American biodiversity by "making it work" as an asset also freezes all involved parties in unequal political and power relations by subsuming tropical biodiversity into the categories of value created by Northern institutions.

I examine the sustainable coffee movement's silences and statements about the broader context regarding the structure of the South as producer and the North as consumer of agricultural commodities such as sugar, bananas, and coffee. Is this context taken as "natural," as an inherent characteristic of the structure of international trade? How the discourse functions in addressing consumption begs for analysis, and a critical eye turned towards this matter is vital. How does this view affect the construction of solutions to the problems of coffee as a commodity and a crop?

Chapter One Notes

1. For an example of this type of moral positioning, see Stephen Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and His Legacy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).
2. Peter Vandergeest and Melanie E. DuPuis, "Introduction," in *Creating the Countryside*, ed. Vandergeest and DuPuis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 2.
3. See Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1993), Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order*, trans. Carol Volk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), and Robert D. Bullard, ed., *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots* (Boston: South End Press, 1993).
4. Gottlieb, 5.
5. Vandergeest and DuPuis, 19.
6. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Environmental Discourses and Human Welfare," Mansfield Center Conference on Landscapes and Community in Asia and the Pacific Northwest, Missoula, 16 Oct. 1995, 1.
7. Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 190.
8. See David Foreman, "Around the Campfire: All Kinds of Wilderness Foes," *Wild Earth* Winter 1996/1997, 1-4, and Michael Soule and Gary Lease, eds., *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction* (Washington DC: Island Press, 1995).
9. Rainforest Alliance web page (Internet: www.rainforest-alliance.org, 1998).
10. Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 313 n28.
11. For a more detailed explication of this occurrence, see Ferry.
12. Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Boston: South End Press, 1997).
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Chapter Two

Birds and Biodiversity in the Sustainable Coffee Discourse

This chapter examines in detail the role of biodiversity conservation in the sustainable coffee movement. The primary concern of this movement is stemming the pace of biodiversity loss in coffee-growing regions. In conservationist discourse, biodiversity currently occupies a strong role as the prime indicator of environmental health. This is a relatively recent occurrence, made possible by scientific and technological advances that represent the natural world according to its genetic code. International institutions such as the World Bank view biodiversity as an asset, thus configuring it into a marketable and quantifiable resource. The discourse of biodiversity conservation is in this way entrenched in capitalist paradigms.

I analyze how the strength of the biodiversity conservation mission creates a set of priorities that necessarily correspond with the categories of its framework. The sustainable coffee movement promotes shade-grown coffee by marketing it as an asset, since it preserves biodiversity. In conclusion, I show the effects of this discourse on the representation of the people in places it targets and on the view that sustainable coffee promoters have of their own place within the dynamic. Indigenous people are represented solely in terms of their cultural diversity, while their social and political situations are ignored. The bird researchers and other envoys from Northern NGOs confidently see themselves as possessing a rightful authority to intervene in Latin America on biodiversity's behalf.

The Problems of Coffee Growing

Concerned with stemming the loss of biodiversity in the world's tropical zones, the sustainable coffee movement represents certain events as causes. By its focus on biodiversity, the sustainable coffee discourse treats as independent causes what other approaches may view as symptoms. By focusing on biodiversity erosion, the discourse misses the pressures and incentives for change in coffee cultivating areas.

The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, which funds biodiversity-oriented research in coffee-growing areas and hosted the First Sustainable Coffee Congress in 1996, is a much-referenced authority in the field. The first line of their web page addressing migratory birds and coffee states that "[i]n the midst of altered and shrinking habitat in both North and Latin America, migratory birds have found a sanctuary in the forest-like environment of traditional coffee plantations."¹ These opening lines emphasize a certain type of coffee plantation in preserving biodiversity. The focus here is on the areas that provide sanctuary for migrating birds. The reason they give as to why this is important is simply that bird habitat is being altered or shrinking in both "North and Latin America." In focusing on traditional coffee plantations that shelter migratory birds, the discourse renders the causes for shrinking habitat in other places invisible.

Similarly, a research report (funded by the SMBC and the Nature Conservancy) addressing bird populations in shade and sun plantations states in its introductory lines that "[a]s more land is converted from natural vegetation to farms and pasture, the role of agroecosystems in conserving biological diversity is receiving more attention (Pimentel et al. 1992)."² Again,

the focus here is on studying the areas where biodiversity is still high. The choice that is made by these researchers is logically one that corresponds with their area of interest: they choose to study biodiversity and not the forces which are making biodiversity conservation a pressing issue. This distinction makes apparent sense, yet as will be discussed later, it plays a part in making some recommendations for change seem more “natural” than others and makes discussion of other ways of looking at agriculture in Latin America more difficult.

Some biodiversity conservation activists distinguish more than others between the causes of change. By looking at how extensively conservationists address the root causes of biodiversity loss, I chart the effects of the privileging of biodiversity on the “action plan” or solutions of its proponents. In other words, does the discourse allow the focus to be entirely on preservation? To what extent does it preclude addressing forces outside conservation initiatives? The Conservation Agriculture Program, a project of the Rainforest Alliance, gives a summary on its web page of “The Problem” it seeks to address. The first part mentions the causes of biodiversity loss: “Like all farming, the production of tropical commodities such as bananas and coffee takes a toll on the environment. Often, endangered rainforests are cleared to make way for new or expanding farms, and diverse tropical ecosystems are replaced with sterile monocultures.”³ Emphasized here is a description of changing land use practices in Central America. The sentence construction is passive: there is no obvious human agency, no differentiation of who is doing what and for whose benefit. It is enough to know that the problem is to some extent “all farming,” and the motivations or benefits to specific groups of human actors is relegated to the periphery.

In a presentation given at the First Sustainable Coffee Congress,

Elizabeth Skinner of the Rainforest Alliance names “deforestation” the superhuman villain with its own will in this drama:

The real threat to biodiversity, economies, and cultures is deforestation. The misuse of chemicals is extremely important for workers and wildlife, but it isn't the most critical issue.... We are losing a million acres a year in Central America and another million per year in Mexico.... The urgency of this threat cannot be understated.⁴

There is no link established here between the causes of deforestation and the use of chemicals; to Skinner these events are without connection. Neither the possible connections nor the health impacts on real people are seen as important to understanding the problem at hand. “Deforestation” is tagged as the culprit, but only as a process without people's interests made visible. It is enough, in her words, to see it occurring and to know that it is harmful. The pressures and incentives for deforestation are absent from her frame of meaning.

Other activists and scientists, however, are more specific. The primary cause of biodiversity loss, they assert, is that coffee farms are increasingly being “technified.” Technification refers to a growing system characterized by full-sun plantations requiring heavy use of petrochemicals.⁵ An article in *Sierra* attributes rainforest loss to the fact that “... small holdings are replaced by or absorbed into large, monocropped, chemical-dependent farms. These ecological disasters were made possible by the development in the 1970s of a high-yield coffee tree that flourishes in full sunlight but requires chemical protection from disease.”⁶ This description is factually correct, it describes the conditions that led to the rise of technified coffee. It leaves out the reasons why there was a push for higher yields, however, and thereby neglects to

address the political and economic reasons for technification. Political and economic forces are outside of the sphere that is of concern here for the understanding of the problem.

Indeed, while the history of technification is often addressed in the discourse, the reasons for it often go unmentioned. When addressed, they are frequently represented only parenthetically. They are decontextualized, solely economically motivated events. This is most visible in articles describing the sustainable coffee movement's relation to bird conservation. An article in *Science News* explains technification by stating that "The growers originally switched to sun plantations, which have drier soil, to save their plants from a common leaf rust that thrives in moist conditions. The rust never proved as destructive as anticipated, but now higher yields tempt farmers to convert."⁷ This history of the incentives to change to sun production shows the push to modernize as a series of conditions that simply exist: first there was the leaf rust, then the temptation of a higher yield.

While these statements are not false, their emphasis marginalizes the political history of such conditions. Sun tolerant coffee varieties were largely engineered in the United States, with financial backing from USAID (United States Agency for International Development), and the profits to be obtained from higher yields are more of an incentive in the post- ICO (International Coffee Agreement) era, in the absence of quotas. These issues will be addressed again later, they are brought up briefly now to remind us of alternative ways in which the problems of coffee production, and their root causes, can be approached. A fundamental aspect of the sustainable coffee discourse is its representation of the problem as simply "technification." It views the current political and economic medium as inherent to coffee-growing regions, rather than as a result of global financial policies and

choices. These ways of seeing the problem already carry possible solutions, and diminish other alternatives.

The focus remains on what to “save” rather than on what to change or what technification incentives to ameliorate. In this case, the traditional coffee farming methods are a boon to biodiversity and are therefore the focus of species conservation efforts. Describing the assets of “traditional” coffee cultivation, a Symposium speaker states, “...this system is mainly characterized by a high degree of biological diversity.”⁸ An ECO-OK Certification program fact sheet states that “[d]epending on the management technique, coffee farms can serve as either a haven or a hazard to wildlife and local residents. Traditionally, coffee was grown under the shade of native rainforest trees, providing habitat for an abundance of wildlife.”⁹ A report funded by the National Science Foundation, the National Geographic Society, the Smithsonian and USAID, also blames technification for biodiversity loss without exploring its causes.

Coffee is traditionally grown under a canopy of shade trees. Because of the structural and floristic complexity of the shade trees, traditional coffee plantations have relatively high biodiversity. However, coffee plantations increasingly are being transformed into industrial plantations with little or no shade.¹⁰

Again, the construction of the statement about technification does not address the forces which are causing the conversion. In the concern to save biodiversity, attention is focused on those areas that still grow coffee the traditional way. Because such coffee plantations often comprise a majority of the remaining forested areas in Latin American countries, they become the location for beneficial intervention on behalf of biodiversity conservation. “Traditional” coffee cultivation is presented as an inherent condition of the places where it is grown, as a trait immemorial to these areas: “In the regions

most heavily used by migratory birds.... coffee plantation 'forests' cover 2.7 million hectares, or almost half of the permanent cropland."¹¹

In the sustainable coffee discourse, coffee plantations are understood as an integral, permanent part of the Latin American landscape. The pressures to modernize are not the issue of focus. I do not argue that they necessarily should be, but rather that the discourse established by a concern over biodiversity creates categories of value, and plans for action, that emphasize certain approaches, define solutions, and leave other possible foci behind.

The Effects of Technification on Biodiversity

The sustainable coffee discourse stresses the threats to biodiversity, and treats all other ramifications of technified coffee (such as the chemical impacts on workers' health and land alienation) as secondary. Chris Wille of the Rainforest Alliance exemplifies this trend: "We're talking about the very existence of countless wild plants and animals... We are losing tropical ecosystems so fast that we don't have time to study them."¹² This alarmist tone is common to much environmental discourse. Emotional and powerful, it creates a reality marked by impending loss and little time. I myself am sympathetic to this view, and to some extent I believe it and see a truth in it. The focus I take, however, is one that sustainable coffee activists may have forgotten to ask in their haste. Emergency situations often lead to moves that are not self-critical enough. But what are we glossing over by labeling biodiversity erosion a critical situation? What are the ramifications of seeing it as an emergency situation, as more critical to address than other aspects of coffee production and consumption? Why isn't the loss of ways of living, growing, and relating to nature seen equally as in need of protection?

To begin to answer these questions, I first turn to an analysis of the emergence of biodiversity conservation as the most powerful environmental concept of our time. Secondly, I look at how this narrative leads to the formation of specific solutions for coffee production methods that threaten biodiversity.

Biodiversity Narratives that Inform the Sustainable Coffee Discourse

Edward O. Wilson, Harvard professor and world expert on ant communities, is often credited as being the father of biodiversity. He is quoted or referred to frequently in environmental magazines and scholarly articles as believing that biodiversity erosion is the greatest threat to life on earth as we know it. In the introduction to the textbook-style anthology *Biodiversity*, he writes:

Biological diversity must be treated more seriously as a global resource, to be indexed, used, and above all, preserved. Three circumstances conspire to give this matter an unprecedented urgency....[population explosion, scientific advances, and irreversible loss due to habitat destruction] We must hurry to acquire the knowledge on which a wise policy of conservation and development can be based for centuries to come.¹³

The relatively new scientific field of conservation biology is based on the belief that species diversity is the key to ecological health. It is, in a sense, a concrete, academic practice of the biodiversity concept. In looking at how the biodiversity mission views itself and its practices, more specific qualities of this scientific indicator of ecological health can be discerned.

Authored by a conservation biologist and three employees of the Washington, D.C.- based Conservation International, an article in

Conservation Biology entitled “Biodiversity Hotspots and Major Tropical Wilderness Areas: Approaches to Setting Conservation Priorities,” illustrates the main tenets of the mission of biodiversity conservation. I examine its language and its method of conferring value to elucidate the connection between biodiversity conservation and the ideology that it fosters.

The first lines of the article state that “[t]he accelerating and potentially catastrophic loss of biotic diversity is unlike other environmental threats because it is irreversible.”¹⁴ Presented as fact, this sentiment harkens back to Wilson’s statement. The reason given, however, for the importance of biodiversity conservation seems a little tenuous. There could be a compelling case made for other environmental threats on the grounds of irreversibility. Hazardous waste contamination and habitat destruction could be given the same prominent place for the very same reason -irreversibility- but they are not accorded such prominence here.

Another fundamental aspect of the biodiversity narrative is the stress on endemism (specifically on plants native to restricted areas) used to identify priority areas for intervention. A table presented in the article lists “Biodiversity hotspots organized in descending order according to plant endemism within them” in a manner that suggests plain fact and authority.¹⁵ But why plant endemism as opposed to insect or mammals? It is not mentioned in the article, but the choice is important. As will be discussed later, the potential profitability of plants for medicine and agricultural research supercedes the potential of other forms of life in this regard. Significant here is that plant endemism as a focus is seen as an obvious, neutral choice, separated entirely from motives that could be political or economic in origin.

The article discusses various approaches to priority-setting and

advocates concentrating on “major tropical wilderness areas,” since they “are still largely intact... have low human population density” and “represent important storehouses of biodiversity and major watersheds.”¹⁶ Preserving relatively pristine tracts of land has been a large part of biodiversity conservation efforts aimed at Southern countries by Northern conservationists. Debt-for-Nature swaps, nature reserve creation and the purchase of rainforest land by Northern NGOs all draw from this same idea. These strategies never involve redistributing wealth or fundamental structural change.

These three facets common to narratives of biodiversity-- its status as the most urgent and important cause, value placed on (plant) endemism, and an emphasis on pristine areas-- are the underpinnings of strategies to conserve species. The sustainable coffee discourse shares the first belief. Even though it draws heavily on biodiversity theory, as a specific project it also deviates from some of the above qualities. It differs especially from the focus on pristine areas, because of the importance of traditional coffee farms for biodiversity conservation. However, it does not depart entirely from the sense of urgency felt by the authors of the article discussed above: biodiversity theory still informs how responses to technification are constructed and implemented. But before focusing on these solutions, they must be re-contextualized. What makes biodiversity the current index of value? We need to broaden the question to view its effect on solutions while taking the political and social history of this phenomenon into account. Without such a contextualization, biodiversity as a measure of worth can be viewed as “natural” fact, divorced from any specific and relevant history.

The Rise of Biodiversity Narratives

Before biodiversity became the buzzword in environmental and scientific circles, other concepts served as markers of value. Tsing locates diversity as the successor to the ecosystems stability model, and explains its rise in importance:

By the 1980s, the commitment to homeostatic models had been scientifically discredited, and moral-political claims about nature's stability were left without scientific support. It was at this moment that conservation biology emerged as a political and scientific successor. Drawing from population biology, with its focus on species dynamics rather than ecosystems, conservation biologists raised moral concerns about extinction and the narrowing of global species diversity. *Diversity* replaced *stability* as the central moral and scientific concern.¹⁷

Rather than being 'discovered' as the key to planetary health, biodiversity as a concept has emerged, and gained increased currency, due in part to the political and social medium of the time. Technological advances made it possible to even think of species from the biodiversity angle. Focusing on species' genetic structure, and representing living beings as stores of information codes, is the level at which both genetic engineering and biodiversity view life and find value. Replacing both natural history and appearance- or function-related taxonomies, the measure of biodiversity is the gene. And the gene itself has become the unit of value because of the focus of technoscientific advances.¹⁸ Indeed, biodiversity's ascendancy is in part due to its association with and similarity to biotechnology. Haraway locates this connection: "Biodiversity and biotechnology are closely linked in humanist and environmentalist ideologies, international conventions, and pedagogy."¹⁹

But why has this occurred? In other words, what has brought biology

and the natural world into the forefront of concerns of powerful institutions that generate discourses on truth and value? Why does the rhetoric of biodiversity conservation strike such a powerful chord with both international decisionmakers as well as environmental activists? These questions merit entire studies in themselves; I address them here as a foundation for a critical analysis of the sustainable coffee movement's discourse on biodiversity. In an essay on biodiversity and cultural politics in Colombia, Arturo Escobar places the rise of the biodiversity concept on tensions within global capitalism:

After two centuries of systematic destruction of nature and life, and through a dialectical process set in motion by capitalism and modernity, the survival of biological life has emerged as a crucial question in the global landscape of capitalism and science. Conservation and sustainable development seem to have become inescapable problems for capital, thus forcing it to modify its older reckless logic.²⁰

If global capitalism, as Escobar writes, must contend with limits (or the perception of natural limits) and address previously-ignored issues, how does this affect our view of the world? Since dominant institutions increasingly focus their attention on life and the natural world through the lens of capitalism, they also influence the views of life held by people living under these institutions. A concept and knowledge-producing idea, biodiversity is not just generated at institutional levels. Yet the institutional programs and operations may affect, however unwillingly, how other movements confer value on the natural world.

Global institutions' support of biodiversity conservation ideas incorporates biodiversity into the powerful discourse of a late twentieth century high-technology worldview. Both Haraway and Escobar describe the

emergence of this phenomenon as specific and recent. Haraway writes that “the scramble for control of ‘biodiversity,’ itself a quite recent discursive object, is complex, global, and fraught with consequences for ways of life.”²¹ Both mention the Biodiversity Convention at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 as a milestone in the increased presence of the biodiversity concept and its legitimacy as a development project. Escobar mentions that the “chief architects of the discourse are easily identifiable: northern environmental NGOs....the World Bank’s GEF, a multibillion-dollar fund with 40 percent of its budget earmarked for biodiversity conservation; and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP).”²²

Of consequence here is that these institutions operate within specific contexts. Rather than being motivated by a neutral, biophilic impulse and concern to save life forms, the medium and pressures within which these institutions work must be taken into account when regarding their slant on biodiversity. Emerging from the new discourse is the implicit view that biodiversity is an asset. The language used is telling-- biodiversity is part of economic systems, and is accorded a place within them by being viewed as something useful. In short, biodiversity needs to “work” in order to be saved. Haraway mentions a project which seeks to “turn biodiversity resources in ‘gene-rich’ developing countries to their advantage.”²³ Escobar locates “biodiversity prospecting” within the capitalist structure that places a high value on genes within an economic context:

[T]he surveying and screening of nature by taxonomists, botanists, and others with the goal of finding species that might lead to valuable pharmaceutical, agrochemical, food, or other commercial applications... is emerging as a leading practice among those adhering to the ‘know it-save it-use it’ equation. Also known as ‘gene hunting,’ since the promise of conservation-*cum*-profits is believed to lie in the genes of the

species, biodiversity prospecting is presented as a respectable protocol of saving nature.²⁴

In seeking to revamp coffee production in order to save biodiversity, the sustainable coffee movement locates itself squarely within this conceptual framework, and designs its recommendations for change within the rules and constraints of the global marketplace. However, by doing this, it implicitly agrees to play by certain rules, which, I argue later, are the very conditions that created and continue to perpetuate the problems of coffee growing regions and countries. It seeks to preserve biodiversity in accordance with global patterns of resource use; in doing this it subscribes to existing inequalities and does not call for fundamental change.

The Role of Biodiversity Narratives in Forming Solutions to Save Habitat in Coffee Growing Regions

The attention focused on agriculture and land use practices in Latin America is shaped by the power of the biodiversity concept. In seeking to preserve the biological richness of these lands, the sustainable coffee discourse places emphasis on areas that feature high levels of diversity. Since shade coffee agroecosystems have a higher level of diversity than sun plantations, the emphasis is overwhelmingly placed on countries dominated by traditional production. Because biodiversity conservation is the top priority within this discourse, there is little or no attention focused on areas where coffee is grown under full sun and with the addition of petrochemicals. Such an emphasis is consistently repeated by promoters of sustainable coffee:

Unlike Brazil, which is the world's largest coffee producer and

where production systems are made up of large-size plantations under sunny monocultures and use high doses of agrochemicals, in Mexico coffee is basically produced by community-based growers on the coastal slopes and under shaded multilayered forests.... By reviewing the connections between coffee growing systems and the biological and cultural diversity of Mexico, this paper is emphasizing the importance of preserving both biotic and cultural richness during the production of coffee.²⁵

This strategy of "save the good, ignore the bad" is shaped by the biodiversity narrative. Characteristic of such an approach is the intervention in sites of high species diversity in order to save them from encroachment that would have irreversible consequences. Indeed, the details of sustainability criteria consistently stress the maintenance of biodiversity-friendly habitat. While sustainable coffee also addresses issues of worker health and indigenous well-being and independence, these criteria are mentioned only in their relation to biodiversity conservation. Overwhelmingly, space and attention in the discourse is accorded to questions of the biological aspects of land use rather than rights to land use, for example.

The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center's criteria-in-progress define sustainability as having nine essential qualities, which address questions of verification, cultural diversity, and market access for producers. The overall definition of sustainability given, however, locates these criteria as primarily guided by the biodiversity mission:

Sustainable coffee is produced on a farm with high biological diversity and low chemical inputs. It conserves resources, protects the environment, produces efficiently, competes commercially and enhances the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.... 1. Practices shall promote the protection of biological diversity, soils, and clean water, and enhance global

carbon sequestration.²⁶

This definition of sustainability is echoed by other certification programs and roasters who buy and market sustainable coffee. A pattern emerges in which many aspects of coffee cultivation that are necessary for sustainability are mentioned. They encompass a wide spectrum of conditions; however, it is always biodiversity that receives the most ink. There are models for various levels of shade intensity and canopy species diversity, guidelines for terracing to prevent runoff leading to soil erosion, and recommendations for composting as well as times for optimal pruning of branches.²⁷ Such detail is common in the discourse, yet when other topics such as “economic security for growers” are mentioned, the view becomes a much more general one, and the guidelines quickly lose their specificity.

Further, human action is viewed as important only within the context of its effect on environmental health: “the maintenance of shaded multispecific agroforests is a key aspect in the definition of sustainable coffee, because this kind of production system supports both biological as well as cultural diversity.”²⁸ This article had dedicated seven pages to the biological aspects of traditional coffee, which it followed with a brief one-page summary and chart of the area’s indigenous linguistic groups. A scientific article on the effects of shade coffee on avian diversity suggests that in “promoting biodiversity on coffee farms,” the definition of environmentally friendly coffee is foremost “the presence of a shade canopy... the greater the structural and floristic diversity of this canopy, the greater the likelihood that resources will be provided for a greater array of organisms.”²⁹

The article’s language targets a science-literate audience. The promotion of sustainable coffee has to a large extent adopted this science-

speak as the center of its platform for action. But biodiversity conservation, in its own narrative and in the case of coffee production, encompasses more than just technical detail. As mentioned earlier, the idea of “biodiversity as an asset” is a central tenet of the narrative. Within the sustainable coffee discourse, this tack is a constantly rehearsed theme.

The sustainable coffee discourse assumes that export commodity crops such as coffee can, indeed, be sustainable. This logic is taken one step further by conflating the continuation of traditional coffee cultivation (shade) with saving biodiversity. Such a view is based on the biodiversity narrative premise that to protect biodiversity, it must be an asset measurable within and accountable to global economic systems. In the white paper *Coffee, Conservation, and Commerce in the Western Hemisphere*, the authors give a description of a model project:

Beneficiaries receive practical advice from other local farmers on management issues such as terracing of hillslopes, composting of organic matter, pruning of coffee plants, inter-cropping techniques to diversify the agricultural landscape and the mix of marketable products, and the process of obtaining the necessary certification that enables coffee to be labeled ‘organic.’ Among the program’s main results has been to increase the attractiveness for local coffee growers to take risks associated with making the transition to conservation-based organic production.³⁰

Unquestioned in this representation of the LaSelva coffee project is the belief that in order to promote conservation, market incentives for organic labeling must exist. It is assumed that these incentives are stable and powerful enough to warrant an increased “mix of marketable products.” This reliance on market demands for organic products in order to achieve conservation goals is presented as a logical given: to save biodiversity it must be made an

asset and incorporated into what the customers are paying for.

Other articles echo this belief in the diversification to other cash crops to save biodiversity: “a structurally and floristically diverse canopy can be beneficial for farmers that manage their plantation to be an economically diverse agroforestry system. The promotion of such systems will lessen the dependence of small farmers on a single cash crop.”³¹ Again, the win-win situation described here is one in which farmer, biodiversity, and export crops exist in a mutually beneficial harmony. In theory, farmers will preserve biodiversity by marketing more varieties of products possible with a “floristically diverse canopy.” This assumption fails to take into account the unpredictability and shaky reliance of producing for markets. The discourse elevates the possible benefits of increased crop diversification for the market to the status of certain truth.

Luis Navarro, speaking at the First Sustainable Coffee Congress, presents biodiversity and watershed development and maintenance in financial terms:

They are an investment in the future, and they support a policy of compensating those who provide these services. As part of this vision we must do research, tests, assessments and diagnosis on a regional basis and identify development programs or projects in which we view natural resources as assets.³²

The language used here draws heavily on banking and commerce metaphors, which in turn promote the discussion of biodiversity within these categories. In creating and using this metaphor as a form of representation, other ways of imagining biodiversity (after all-- simply plants and animals) in these regions become more difficult. These metaphors have become the norm in the sustainable coffee discourse. In a conference paper, a

Yale Forestry graduate student stated since her “professional background is in biodiversity conservation... [she] thought it would be interesting to identify how to perpetuate shaded farms through economic mechanisms.”³³ Her interest comes as no surprise here: it is the most obvious step, from a background in biodiversity conservation, to implement programs that view economic mechanisms as the solution. While presented in her statement as something she chose to do, her current focus is in line with the basic beliefs of “use it to save it.”

Such a position seems logical, or even favorable, within our current political climate and the method with which solutions are designed in American society. To develop a project’s potential financial strength or viability is a prerequisite for being taken seriously. In the arena of politics and policy, crafting a financially unpromising plan is an unpopular route. However, in drawing heavily on the “biodiversity as an asset” metaphor to the exclusion of other analyses, in focusing only on remaining shade plantations, and in accepting the biodiversity conservation discourse without scrutiny of the other interests underlying its formation and deployment, the sustainable coffee discourse puts itself in a precarious position. In operating as it does, it has omitted filling some fundamental gaps within its strategy. These silences integral to the discourse ultimately have the effect of insulating it from addressing questions of power differences, US foreign policy, and consumer society, and thus prevent it from calling for change that addresses more than biological and social symptoms.

What does the biodiversity discourse leave out, even within its own set of parameters?

The sustainable coffee movement's goal of preserving biodiversity in Central America by saving shade coffee agrosystems is, in a sense, an ironic maneuver. Biodiversity theory in general concentrates on species that are endemic to certain areas, as well as on whole areas that feature high levels of endemism. Paradoxically, it is coffee farms that now harbor a disproportionately large number of species. But it was coffee, along with other introduced crops destined for European markets, that radically altered the Latin American landscape two hundred years ago.

The arabica variety of coffee (which is the type largely cultivated in Latin America) is of Ethiopian origin. Cultivated for the first time by Arab traders almost 1000 years ago, it is a naturally occurring understory species, found between 4000 and 6000 ft. in elevation.³⁴ Some lore and speculation surround the stories of its introduction to Latin America. All of these origin stories, however, take place in the 18th century, which certainly leaves coffee out of consideration for "endemic" status in the New World. Common dates cited are 1713 for the introduction of coffee to Martinique, and fourteen years later to Brazil.³⁵

Coffee is a central part of the current agroexport system that has fundamentally shaped Latin American society, farming practices, and political structures. Without crops such as sugar, timber, rubber, coffee, and bananas, the realities within exporting countries (as well as within importing countries!) would be unrecognizably different. What the biodiversity-friendly coffee efforts miss is an awareness of the complexity and importance of these realities. Coffee, an imported plant, radically altered and continues to play a large role in Central American land use, yet now is seen as a 'last refuge for biodiversity.' This fact could open up the possibility for questions regarding human roles in biodiversity stewardship and the sustainability of export

agriculture. But in simply seeing shade coffee and biodiversity as Latin America's natural condition, these other avenues are left unexplored in the sustainable coffee discourse and its projects.

Most notably, small-scale shade plantations are continually described as the "traditional" coffee cultivation system. Almost every article, pamphlet, or speech given on the subject mentions this: "an industrial transformation of the coffee sector threatens the traditional coffee agroecosystem" and "traditional, small-scale farmers often had a mosaic of farming systems."³⁶

This is a narrow assessment of the history of coffee growing. Only two speeches given at the Sustainable Coffee Congress mention that coffee was originally a large plantation crop, dependent on hired indigenous labor. One of them mentions that in Guatemala, "growers came to wield influence over department government officials, who helped growers secure labor for building roads into plantation areas."³⁷ Not until later was it incorporated into the diversified farming systems of small-scale cultivators. This is mentioned in another speech at the Congress: "Presently, [c]offee farming in Mexico is for the most part in peasant hands, although this has not always been the case. From its arrival in Mexico, in 1790, until the Cardenista land reform (1934-40), coffee was a plantation crop."³⁸

In calling this more recent system "traditional," a significant chapter of the history of coffee is virtually erased. This omission is integral to the biodiversity and coffee discourse; even within its own parameters, something is glossed over. To ignore the plantation origins of Latin American coffee cultivation and focus instead on small scale indigenous producers is to naturalize and simplify the social complexity of the crop. It is turned into an aspect of the landscape rather than a result of social and political forces. Stolcke points out that "[r]ather than in response to local needs, coffee

growing in Latin America began wholly in response to foreign demand.”³⁹

In not taking account the reasons for coffee’s introduction, the sustainable coffee movement’s emphasis on “biodiversity” takes an overtly political turn. The discourse represents a social process as a natural one. Whether intentional or not, such a move smoothes the way towards seemingly apolitical interventions.

In seeing coffee as a plant “traditionally” grown in Latin America, the effects of coffee per se on pre-plantation biodiversity are neutralized. In other words, in viewing coffee as a natural part of Latin America, the discourse begs critical questions: is coffee necessary? Is its current trend towards sun production systems inevitable? It thereby steers clear of issues outside the scientific realm when considering biodiversity. In a study of birds found in different types of Guatemalan plantations, Greenberg points out that “...coffee plantations were both faunistically distinct and depauperate compared to remnant forest habitats.”⁴⁰ However, the sustainable coffee movement sees its goals as beneficial to all involved parties - the farmers, consumers, and biodiversity advocates.

Further, in focusing on small-scale coffee farms farmed by peasants as part of a diverse polyculture, biodiversity conservationists are concentrating on lands that are usually “marginal.” In Central America, large-scale growers of export crops such as bananas and sun-plantation coffee control the highest quality land. Peasant producers and smaller operations usually work land that is hilly and of poorer soil quality. Vandermeer and Perfecto, in debunking the myths of the causes of biodiversity erosion put forth by Northern NGOs, write:

Hillside soils have one important characteristic. They erode very rapidly. The natural vegetation that covers them is effectively

the only protection they have against severe erosion. When converted to agriculture, hillside soils are rapidly eroded; the topsoil washes away and they soon become unproductive. Unfortunately, because of economic and socio-political pressures, many peasant farmers are forced to farm these soils with inevitably poor results.⁴¹

Even if coffee has less impact than, for example, corn or rice, any agriculture in marginal areas has a detrimental effect on the natural vegetation. By concentrating on these areas exclusively, the promoters of environmental coffee are encouraging agriculture where it is, from a strictly biological perspective, the most harmful. Rather than trying to ameliorate the negative biological effects of sun coffee, the discourse targets "traditionally" cultivated coffee lands as the object of its programs and recommendations. In its desire to maintain biodiversity while still supporting large-scale export agriculture, the discourse attempts to align biodiversity goals with global economic practices by viewing it as an asset. But is such a goal possible?

In a similarly glaring omission, the discourse gives little attention, or even acknowledges, the negative effects of chemicals on sun plantations. As was discussed earlier, this policy of "save the good, ignore the bad" negates the importance of the conditions of technified coffee. According to an article in the *Utne Reader*, coffee is

...the third most heavily sprayed crop in the world, right after cotton and tobacco. 'More than 70 percent of the world's coffee is sprayed with synthetic chemicals'-- including malathion and DDT, long banned in the United States.⁴²

A major consequence of these practices is that while the discourse concentrates on habitats, the chemicals used on sun plantations circulate through the watersheds and the bodies of workers on these plantations. Of

course these contaminations have effects on biodiversity as well. The discourse seems to recognize these problems, but does not deal with them directly. Pesticides are mentioned within the context of the harmful effects of technified plantations, and then the next step is to call for the support of traditional plantations. In Rice and Ward's paper, for instance, the very last table in the appendix is a list of pesticides detected in coffee beans imported to the U.S. from Latin America. Colombian, Guatemalan, Haitian and Brazilian beans all had detectable levels of BHC; all but the Guatemalan beans had DDT residues, and Brazilian beans outdid all the others with a list of seven detectable pesticides. According to the chart, all of these levels are illegal.⁴³

While the chart is published, its findings are not integrated into the recommendations made by sustainable coffee promoters. No movement literature describes, or attempts to organize, a change in the political and economic structures that are responsible for continued pesticide use. Confronting these problems head-on, rather than encouraging an alternative, would cast the "biodiversity and coffee" narrative outside of the safe shell of scientific neutrality and into the messy arena of agricultural policy and politics.

Instead, the discourse recommends supporting "sustainable coffee," rather than changing the policies which promote heavy spraying. This tactic reeks of agricultural apartheid. The *Utne Reader* asks, "Is there an alternative to (gasp!) giving up coffee? According to Katzeff [CEO of Thanksgiving Coffee Company], the answer lies in buying organic coffee."⁴⁴ Presented here are just two options: giving up coffee (apparently unthinkable), and supporting sustainable coffee with purchase power. The discourse leaves little room, and dedicates even less attention to, confronting the situations that are negative. In its conservation mission, the optimism of looking at the bright, seemingly

viable aspects of coffee production exiles to the periphery the most fundamental problems of the production of the vast majority of the world's coffee: widespread political inequality and export-oriented land use.

Biodiversity Here and There: Conservation Tactics at Home and Abroad

Since so much of the attention focused on the maintenance of shade coffee growing systems stems from Northern environmentalists' concern over the fate of migratory songbirds, it is imperative to compare how their discourse addresses biodiversity conservation at home and abroad. Within the discussions of biodiversity conservation, Northern environmentalists speak of biodiversity in the Third World as a "global resource," while conservation measures in the United States are approached through nationalistic and legal avenues, and are not an asset belonging to humanity, but the heritage of a specific country.

Sustainable coffee promoters' recommendations assume that they have the authority to interfere in Latin American production systems because biodiversity constitutes a marketplace asset. The moral or political right to such a representation of the plants and animals of coffee producing areas is not questioned. The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center's "Shade Management Criteria for 'Bird-Friendly™' Coffee" web page, for example, displays a stunning level of detail regarding cultivation practices. In this four-page document, recommendations such as the following abound:

Biological diversity probably increases with the amount of canopy cover. However, coffee is not necessarily a full-shade plant. As a compromise between these considerations, SMBC recommends a minimum shade cover of 40% at solar noon that can be estimated or measured with an optical densiometer.⁴⁵

A compromise between considerations! While these standards have their own kind of logic, the reality of coffee growing makes them seem fetishistic. An independent organic coffee certifier may own an optical densiometer, but unless such a professional is willing to work without pay, the small scale growers will not become certified due to the prohibitive expense. Furthermore, the reward for certification is usually only a little more money per bag of coffee, certainly not enough to be an incentive to invest a considerably larger amount of labor into the enterprise.⁴⁶

The web page also asserts that “further research is required ... above and beyond the minimally acceptable management practices for farmers.”⁴⁷ Research carried out by who? To what ends? Such research scrutiny into Third World farms would never be tolerated in the United States. The SMBC doesn’t see its double standard, its neocolonial view. This document claims to have been drafted in the “spirit of cooperation” with all interested parties, but its underlying message contradicts this statement. While the descriptions of the shade plantation gradients themselves seem unbiased, overall this list of criteria constitutes a top-down set of recommendations which farmers are asked to comply with. But for whose benefit? The recommendations, if followed, would result in the grower’s practices being considered “sustainable” by the SMBC. The criteria descriptions are silent regarding who this would benefit, financially and otherwise. This document assumes the SMBC and the coffee growers operate with the same set of incentives and goals, and that biodiversity conservation is a matter to be certified by a Washington- based organization.

The Thanksgiving Coffee Company’s web page displays a similar attitude towards environmentally-friendly coffee growing. It assumes that the coffee company’s desires are a universal good, and condescendingly “rewards”

the farmers for the stewardship they practice: "we actively support organic growers who consciously struggle to live in harmony with the land they farm."⁴⁸ Such a depiction of indigenous coffee growers demeans them by representing them as being toiling, pure, and downtrodden, and then thankfully rewarded by a California-based roaster. The "struggle" that this obscures is something else altogether-- Latin American peasants' political and historical struggles over land dispossession, national agroexport incentives, and political marginalization. To the Thanksgiving Coffee Company, it is simply a matter of financially compensating organic growers for forwarding the company's agenda: "an energy-efficient, sustainable agriculture that projects a deep moral message."⁴⁹

The sustainable coffee discourse's obsession with biodiversity within growing regions is at odds with the reality of migratory songbird decline. While various factors cause declining bird numbers, the discourse places the bulk of its attention on conserving wintering habitat in Latin America, and not on habitat fragmentation in the Northern summering grounds. An article in *Science* mentions these causes at the outset before launching into the familiar focus on coffee growing:

According to the U.S. Breeding Survey, over 25 years, wood thrush numbers have dropped by 40%, and the gold-winged warbler and orchard oriole are down by 46% and 29%, respectively. In recent years, researchers have suspected that the loss of natural forest is to blame-- whether the burning of tropical forests, where migratory songbirds winter, or the fragmentation of northern woodlands, where the birds breed.⁵⁰

It is more than likely that a combination of factors are causing migratory songbird decline. Yet the authority with which recommendations are devised for Latin America in the U.S. insinuate that it is the rightful place of Northern environmentalists to tell coffee farmers in Latin America what

to do about the biodiversity in their countries.

This attitude of rightful intervention is justified by the view that the biological richness of the world is a global resource. The fact that tropical countries have more endemic species is pitted as a further rationale to consider diversity as a world asset. Such a view smoothes the way towards the kinds of interventions that are beneficial to the terms and priorities set by Northerners, who see themselves as being in a position to “save the world’s biodiversity”-- which is, after all, a heritage for all of humanity. A participant in the Certification Working Group at the First Sustainable Coffee Congress suggested that “the use of global satellite or GIS/GPS systems could be used to verify presence of shade trees.”⁵¹ The recommendation of high-tech surveillance measures represents the extremes that can be reached when these beliefs regarding biodiversity in Third World countries are followed to their logical end.

But migratory birds, as mentioned above, also rely on intact Northern habitats for their breeding grounds. In the literature on sustainable coffee, there is no overt link between preserving habitat in the United States and Canada with preserving shade plantations in Central America. The article in *Science* mentioned earlier points out that

By all accounts, migratory songbirds face serious problems along their migration routes and in their North American breeding grounds, including habitat fragmentation and predation by human-associated animals such as cats, raccoons, and crows.⁵²

Within the environmentalist discourse, however, there is no attempt to forge a partnership to conserve all the habitats of migrant birds. Conservation issues in the United States are treated as a separate issue by the promoters of bird-friendly coffee. They are simply not mentioned in the

context of supporting habitat in coffee-growing regions. This evident lack of a connection between factors that are biologically intrinsically tied together is telling. To environmentalists here, biodiversity becomes a different matter when it involves their home country. Habitat in the U.S., and the endangered species it supports, is not referred to as a “global resource.” In all the controversy about grizzly bear conservation in the Northern Rockies, for example, the calls for preservation are supported by statements such as “the bears have an inherent right to exist” and “we must preserve them for future generations.” The United States as seen from within is not viewed as a “global commons,” yet the species in Third World countries fit into exactly this category. What is being done, if anything, to preserve migratory songbird habitat in the United States cannot be gleaned from a thorough review of the sustainable coffee literature, although the fate of suitable habitat here is a critical factor in bird conservation.

Biodiversity preservation campaigns in the United States have primarily deployed the legal system. The Endangered Species Act, not the commodification of products from critical habitat, is the major piece of legislation wielded by environmentalists. An article focusing on the protection of biodiversity in urban areas mentions that “[a]lthough the goal of the Act is protection of individual species of concern, its ‘purposes... are to provide a means whereby the ecosystems upon which endangered species depend may be conserved.’”⁵³

Of course, to work for political changes within other governments is much more difficult than to interfere through the private realm. This factor surely plays a role in determining how environmentalists approach biodiversity here and in other countries. However, the difference in tactics cannot be reduced to this one reason. The ease with which the sustainable

coffee movement sees itself as occupying a morally correct place in viewing biodiversity as an asset illustrates that other interests are being served. The efforts to conserve Latin American biodiversity by “making it work” in the global economy also freezes all involved parties in unequal political and power relations by subsuming tropical biodiversity into the categories of value created by Northern institutions.

The American populace as a whole also is more likely to bumpersticker their cars with pleas to “save the rainforest,” buy Rainforest Nectar fruit juices, and decry tropical logging than it is to treat biodiversity erosion in its own country with the same sort of alarm it reserves for faraway regions. The much-publicized case of the threatened spotted owl in the Pacific Northwest is illustrative of this disjunction. Mainstream environmentalists, the mass media, government, and timber companies framed the spotted owl debate as “owls versus jobs.” There was little, if any, discussion of the spotted owl as a “global resource.”

While biodiversity conflicts in the United States are played out squarely in the political realm, mainstream U.S. environmentalists’ attention to Latin America is void of questions of political and economic power. Instead, tropical areas conservation is treated as a “win-win” situation, ripe for success if only the coffee farmers could be made to see the light about their role as beneficial stewards of a “global resource,” efforts for which they would be rewarded with a slight premium in coffee prices in exchange for a large increase in labor and time. Political inequality and unequal land distribution cease to exist as meaningful factors in the pace of biodiversity erosion in Latin America in the view of the dominant environmentalist discourse. While biodiversity conservation in the United States is either relegated to the margins (after all, most species are concentrated in the tropics) or approached

as a highly contentious political topic, the Latin American situation is presented as straightforward and based on supposedly neutral, scientific factors. E.O. Wilson sums up this common position:

Fortunately, both scientists and environmental policy makers have established a solid linkage between economic development and conservation. The problems of human beings in the tropics are primarily biological in origin: overpopulation, habitat destruction, soil deterioration, malnutrition, disease, and even, for hundreds of millions, the uncertainty of food and shelter from one day to the next. These problems can be solved in part by making biological diversity a source of economic wealth.⁵⁴

Viewing the problems in Central America as simply biological is precedent for the justification of policies and actions which can lay claim to being rational, scientific, and above all, unbiased. Such a stance towards Third World countries espoused by Northerners is just the opposite, however. Assertions such as Wilson's have much to do with politics and power. Whether crafted intentionally or swept up by powerful rhetorics, Wilson operates within an ideological paradigm that is fundamentally self-serving.

What are the consequences of such a paradigm? What does the biodiversity discourse marginalize outside of its own worldview?

The conviction of scientific neutrality exhibited by Wilson's statement justifies placing biodiversity conservation goals in coffee regions above and fundamentally separate from the social and political contexts within which this biodiversity exists. Just as Wilson presents the commercialization of biodiversity as a universal good, the promoters of sustainable coffee refer to their enterprise as benefiting all those involved. The work to be done, then, becomes a matter of educating those still ignorant of the enlightened goals of

biodiversity-sustaining coffee.

Elizabeth Skinner of the Rainforest Alliance, for example, hopes to “transform the whole coffee industry so that growers and workers understand the importance and interdependence of coffee and rainforest ecosystems.”⁵⁵ The picture painted here is one of a matter of simply educating growers and workers. If they only understood what was at stake, Skinner assumes, they would embrace her priorities. Rather than determining why growers and workers devalue conservation (which she assumes they do), her goal is to enlighten them with her principles. The possibility that growers may be more concerned with obtaining higher yields and lowering labor costs, and that workers might be primarily concerned with feeding their families, is not considered in Skinner’s strategy.

Similarly, organic coffee marketer David Griswold believes that consumers also need “education” in order to change their coffee-drinking priorities. He assumes that since he values biodiversity conservation, others will as well as soon as they have access to the pertinent information: “The need to bring about drastic changes to today’s coffee situation is clear... Given these realities, at some point the environmental issues will become important to coffee drinkers.”⁵⁶ In Griswold’s view, the consumers’ diffidence to the environmental and social consequences of their habit can be corrected through information dissemination. Rather than questioning the factors that form and maintain this lack of connection between the origins of coffee and its consumers, he believes that we can heal this disjuncture without changing the structures and relations of coffee as a commodity in any fundamental way.

These statements’ self-assurance illustrates a lack of awareness of the context within which they are conceptualized and disseminated. There is no

understanding on the part of sustainable coffee promoters such as Skinner and Griswold that their own interests have been shaped by dominant discourses. Quite the opposite is true-- they subscribe to the hegemonic status and take its stance as ultimate authority. The biodiversity discourse which underlies their statements, with its belief in its own logic and neutrality, omits the history of varying emphases placed on different environmental problems throughout the last several decades. As was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, biodiversity has only recently obtained the status of the prime measure of ecological health that it now enjoys.

The sustainable coffee movement only took shape and gathered momentum due to the power of biodiversity narratives that led to concern with tropical biodiversity. The other factors motivating this movement-- water quality, worker health, and organic agriculture-- become increasingly tangential issues that would probably not have been brought to the attention of coffee drinkers in the North had biodiversity not been threatened. These other aspects of coffee cultivation existed before the alarm over biodiversity erosion, but they did not evoke enough concern on the part of U.S. NGOs to form a movement that was heard by consumers. Rice and Ward explain the recent rise in attention:

Coffee drinkers historically have had little reason to contemplate the environmental dimensions of their habit. Yet, over the past 15 or 20 years, dramatic changes associated with the ecological, social and economic sustainability of coffee have redefined coffee production in northern Latin America. Only recently has it come to light that the way coffee is produced profoundly affects migratory bird diversity and other ecological indicators of environmental health.⁵⁷

Was plantation coffee, picked by indigenous laborers, ever sustainable socially? Are the last two decades the only time in which an export

commodity such as coffee has caused economic disparities between growers and retailers? Rice and Ward paint a picture of a beneficial^{*} industry gone awry in the last twenty years. Thus they romanticize and fictionalize the past by treating it unworthy of concern. Their statements sanitize the past so that we do not have to ask of ourselves why we were not concerned before, but are so worried about this crop now.

Just as the Green Revolution in the 1970s was buttressed by claims to logic and universality-- more crops produced more efficiently was seen as an obvious improvement-- the sustainable coffee discourse also situates itself as the promoter of unquestionable aims. Similar to the cataloging of genes for the Human Genome Diversity Project and the search for miracle plant drugs from the rainforest by pharmaceutical companies, the sustainable coffee movement is a consequence of the rise of biodiversity narratives, not of value-free scientific reason. The way species are discussed and represented in the discourse, the metaphor of life forms as being resources and assets, firmly entrench the movement in capitalist paradigms. Coffee is in a sense then the ultimate commodity, not just because it is the world's second-most traded commodity after oil, but because locating it within the biodiversity narrative helps further the conceptualization of biodiversity in coffee growing regions in terms of their value as assets.

The agreement between Merck, the world's largest pharmaceutical company, and Costa Rica's biodiversity inventory and conservation organization (INBio), for the purposes of the commercialization and conservation of biodiversity, is a contract that shows how such projects view local people and local life forms. It is "a watershed in the history of 'biodiversity prospecting'-- the exploration of biodiversity for commercially valuable genetic and biochemical resources."⁵⁸ The language of its opening

pages elucidates the consequence of the view of “biodiversity as an asset.” The authors of *Biodiversity Prospecting* proclaim their solution to the gap between the concerns of international researchers and local Costa Ricans:

Since wealth and technology are as concentrated in the North as biodiversity and poverty are in the South, the question of equity is particularly hard to answer in ways that satisfy everyone with a stake in the outcome.... hard-pressed rural communities can benefit from biodiversity prospecting in their vicinity-- for instance, through the training and jobs provided by INBio's parataxonomist program.⁵⁹

This statement justifies the biodiversity prospecting in Costa Rica by first calling the local communities “hard-pressed” (it doesn’t explain why they might be; that is of no concern to the authors) and then offering help by involving people in their enterprise by training them to catalog different species. The authors do not scrutinize their own motives or why they feel they have the authority to intervene in this way. The sustainable coffee movement operates under the same principles: it looks at what it wants (the maintenance of biodiversity in shade plantations) and then assumes the arrogance of right and universal good, and lastly enrolls local people in its project by naming its goals as a potential positive in their lives. The subtext of these statements is that if only the coffee farmers would grow coffee the way we want them to, if only “hard-pressed” villagers would enroll in parataxonomist classes, then everything would proceed smoothly.

Concerned Scientists Meet the Natives: How does the “Biodiversity and Coffee” Discourse View Local Knowledge and Agency?

Enveloped in their beliefs about biodiversity, and convinced of the pressing importance of their scientific research, Russell Greenberg and his

bird research team were “in the field” in Chiapas when the EZLN rebellion of 1994 occurred:

The team worked in Chiapas from 1990 to 1994, when the region’s peasant uprising forced the group to abandon its research site. ‘We woke up one day surrounded by Zapatistas,’ he recalls. ‘For the next 3 days, we were surrounded by Mexican soldiers, who didn’t believe we were really there to study birds.’⁶⁰

The Mexican soldiers couldn’t believe that a bunch of Americans in the forest actually were oblivious to the rebellion and thought of it only in terms of hampering their research, and Greenberg seems unaware of the irony of this confluence of events. While the rebellion called for the redistribution of land to peasants and opposed the increased international trade of the region’s products, Greenberg was fine-tuning his recommendations for the cultivation of an export crop in order to maximize biodiversity. He probably failed to think that without the land-use practices of people such as the Zapatistas, and without their resistance to giving up *ejidos* (communally held land) and certain farming practices, the current state of biodiversity in Chiapas would be very different indeed. Yet he views Chiapas biodiversity and its political situation as separate categories. He misses the connection between local indigenous control and use of land, and the maintenance and even improvement of species diversity.⁶¹ In his analysis of biodiversity narratives, Zerner locates statements such as Greenberg’s in what he calls

... a master story about these peoples and their marginalization: the act of imagining a natural world which has not been shaped by local peoples, or in which local communities are conceptualized as separate from the natural world and impediments to its conservation.⁶²

Similarly, an anecdote from the most recent Specialty Coffee

Association of America conference in April 1998 displays the rift between the priorities of sustainable coffee promoters in the First World and Third World coffee workers. Susie Spindler, a marketing representative of the SCAA, was sitting next to a woman from Burundi at the conference. After listening to a speech on the importance of shade management for bird habitat, the woman exclaimed, "Birds! We eat birds to survive!"⁶³ The sustainable coffee movement downplays the social dimensions of coffee growing, and recommends improvements in a top-down manner which only superficially concerns itself with reforming the political and social inequalities that exist in coffee growing regions.

Third World people, especially indigenous coffee growers, are represented by the sustainable coffee discourse as valuable because of their "cultural diversity." They are constructed as a product of evolution rather than of social and historical factors. Biodiversity-friendly coffee promoters see themselves, on the other hand, as technically able to sort through and save tropical biodiversity through their marketing and education efforts in the U.S. and in coffee producing regions. Since biodiversity loss is seen as the root of the problem, a certain apoliticality ensues. The factors in Latin America and in the United States that contribute to the technification of coffee are glossed over, since the focus is placed on the maintenance of shade coffee rather than on tackling political and economic pressures to modernize production. A sustainable coffee movement based on these tenets enables its promoters to continue their belief in current trade structures even though they comprise the heart of the current problem. Thus environmentally-friendly coffee can be cheerfully promoted as a "win-win" proposition. Vandermeer and Perfecto address this stance, common in Northern environmentalist thought:

Perhaps... these root causes create conditions in other spheres of life, which the conservationists would not like to see challenged. Perhaps the same political arrangements, which provide conservationists with the privilege to ponder such weighty questions as, for example, biodiversity, also create impoverishment that forces peasants to cut down rain forests.⁶⁴

How the sustainable coffee discourse views and represents the socioeconomic and political contexts of coffee production, as well as the recommendations it suggests for their improvement within coffee growing regions, is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Two Notes

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58. Walter V. Reid et al, *Biodiversity Prospecting: Using Genetic Resources for Sustainable Development* (USA: World Resources Institute,

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62. Charles Zerner, "Telling Stories About Biological Diversity," in *Valuing Local Knowledge: Indigenous People and Intellectual Property Rights*, ed. Stephen Brush and Doreen Stabinsky (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1996), 71.

63. Susie Spindler, personal interview, 14 Oct. 1998.

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Chapter Three

Development Ideology and the Sustainable Coffee Discourse

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze the representations of the social, political, economic, and historical contexts of coffee production in the sustainable coffee discourse. I argue that the sustainable coffee movement prescribes solutions and interventions consistent with dominant developmentalist ideologies. I give a short background of development narratives, and show how they produce representations and narratives that keep crucial knowledge out of the picture. These solutions maintain the uneven balance of power between and within countries, and serve to perpetuate rather than to ameliorate the problems they are designed to solve.

The concepts underlying the biodiversity conservation's strategies have gained currency as part of the larger context of "development." Northern interpretations of Third World countries are shaped by implicit beliefs in progress towards sophisticated technology, in the unquestioned good of market participation, and in the definition of ever broader parts of life as economic. The shape of biodiversity conservation emerged out of these values. For the last sixty years, the gaze of Northerners towards Southern countries has been informed by a set of beliefs so widespread now that they are accepted as fact. The professionalization and institutionalization of development are "mechanisms through which a politics of truth is created and maintained, through which certain forms of knowledge are given the

status of truth.”¹

The Influence of Development Narratives on the Representation of Coffee Production

I use the terms “development ideology” and “developmentalism” to signify the beliefs that underlie how Northern governmental and financial institutions describe Latin American political, social, and environmental conditions. In this section I explain three facets of developmentalism that influence the United States coffee industry’s dominant representation of coffee production. While I refer to the sustainable coffee discourse at times, the text I use as “data” is from *Coffee & Cocoa International*, a trade journal. This general critique of developmentalism provides a context for a later analysis of the sustainable coffee discourse’s relation to development.

The most defining characteristic of developmentalist thought is the high status it places on progress. Progress towards industrialization or towards increasingly more sophisticated and efficient technology, is conceptualized as moving in evolutionary form. A belief in progress is encoded in the way Westerners speak about achievement and failure. The concept of progress represents other countries as “less developed,” a description that illustrates this bias. Because of the belief in evolutionary change, nonindustrialized countries are represented as temporally behind countries that are industrial or post-industrial.

The sustainable coffee movement’s enthusiasm for preserving “traditional” shade coffee plantations superficially appears to be in opposition to such meta-narratives of progress. However, it remains fundamentally

aligned with them in that shade plantations are only presented favorably because they are efficient. The sustainable coffee discourse measures their efficiency by a new yardstick: the conservation of biodiversity, an asset to be maximized. In other words, the sustainable coffee discourse values a specific farming system for its efficiency in producing (and maintaining) a certain asset, rather than in its ability to increase yields. This (new) efficiency still requires new investment and thus increased economic activity: farms must be measured and certified in order to benefit financially from their production methods. William Fisher, writing about representations of Native Amazonians, notes that

Together with modernization ideology, the environmental movement also takes as the central problem (and hence also similar notions of social agency) as one of 'development' and offers alternative solutions that are less destructive of the environment.²

The environmentalists desire a different outcome of a certain technology or practice than development and modernization planners. But their goal of maximizing efficiency places their projects firmly in line with developmentalism's basic tenets. The sophisticated technology in this case is the small-scale shade coffee plantation, because it is compatible with conservation goals. Such a valorization is still developmentalist since it remains concerned with efficiency and with promoting assets-- in this case, biodiversity rather than high yields.

Another fundamental characteristic of developmentalist perspectives is the belief that market participation and commerce are inherently beneficial. Their favored status is encoded in how *Coffee & Cocoa International* presents Nicaragua's coffee sector:

In January 1986, the Sandinistas passed additional laws that enabled the government to expropriate even efficient farms for "public utility." Approximately one million hectares of land had already been distributed to farm workers' co-operatives and landless labourers... For coffee, the effects of this situation were dramatic, and production collapsed. By then, most of the large growers had been forced out of business, and many fled to start a new life.³

The Sandinista's reforms are described negatively and wealthy landowners are portrayed as hapless victims in an unfair situation. The author laments that land redistribution affected "even efficient farms," thereby implying that efficiency is good regardless of whom it ultimately serves. The use of land for "public utility" is set off in quotes and presented as highly suspect. The next sentence states that much land "had already been distributed," the subtext here is that land allocation to cooperatives, or, worse yet, "labourers," causes a strain on a once-optimal situation. This article treats coffee as if it had interests and desires of its own: it fared poorly after the Sandinista's new laws went into effect. The measure of worth in this description is the degree of involvement in international markets. Since reforms curbed this involvement, they are presented as negative.

Because developmentalist narratives treat participation in international markets as unquestionably positive, they also look favorably on foreign investment. This is true especially in representations of poor areas, where investment is seen as absolutely necessary to growth. Rather than explaining why investment is good, developmentalist narratives treat its desirability as a given. Such truth-claims appear in the same article about Nicaragua: "But the main obstacle to fresh investments in the country's coffee industry is the contentious issue of land ownership."⁴ If only that pesky political situation would clear up, it is implied, then the real business of

Nicaragua could finally get started.

A third and corollary characteristic of development narratives grows out of the belief that market participation is desirable: the representation of other parts of life not related to commerce in economic terms. Such representations of economic gain as the ultimate indicator of value are a consequence of beliefs in the centrality of markets. The title of the article on Nicaragua's coffee sector is indicative of the belief that economic strength is of paramount importance. "Back on Track: Consultant Renaud Cuchet reviews the situation [of] Central America's smallest coffee producer, which is once again living up to its potential after more than a decade of strife" tacitly assumes that increased output of coffee destined for international markets is the right "track" for Nicaragua.⁵ Further, the "decade of strife" is mentioned only in the context of its impact on decreased profits. Political struggle and upheaval are only mentioned in the context of their effects on trade. The article thereby implies that such significant changes are to be judged exclusively through the lens of potential profits.

The last paragraph reiterates the same belief. It reports that "the future of the Nicaraguan coffee industry looks bright, as long as growers, exporters, and government officials are able to co-operate and set aside their personal differences."⁶ Serious questions of political power, of control over how and for whom coffee is grown, at what scale, and with whose methods-- all of these concerns are treated as merely "personal differences" that rightfully must be set aside in order to further production for international markets. A representation such as this one relegates non-economic and social justice issues to the periphery, and simultaneously recasts them in economic terms. It accomplishes this by treating political issues as phenomena to be judged by their impact on economic output. Thereby, this article succeeds in

representing non-economic events, when they are even considered, in solely economic terms.

The widespread deployment of such powerful discourses affects not only the representation of entire countries, but also the policy and plans directed towards them by international financial institutions and governments at many levels. The primacy of the measuring of worth solely in economic terms marginalizes other ways of categorizing the world. Vandergeest and DuPuis point out that representations of rural areas generated elsewhere are often at odds with the self-image of rural people:

The construction of boundaries between these categories may contradict the 'real' histories and lives of rural people whose everyday lives may not be governed by these boundaries or who may understand these categories in a way very different from those at the center of power.⁷

Development discourses assume that specific categories of understanding the world exist in fixed and inherent relations to each other. "The economy," "nature," "religion,"-- all these are represented as occupying fixed places and as having set connections to each other. The sustainable coffee movement's representations of coffee growing areas result in the creation of programs and initiatives which refer more to the mindsets and incentives of the planners than to the needs of the areas and people they target. Escobar writes that a classic characteristic of development plans is the irony that its "most important exclusion, however, was and continues to be what development was supposed to be all about: people."⁸

How does the sustainable coffee discourse represent the social, historical, political, and economic conditions of coffee growing countries?

An examination of how the sustainable coffee discourse represents coffee growing countries reveals its priorities. Even though it recommends rather specific changes, the sustainable coffee discourse often describes the importance of coffee production to Latin America in vague, generalizing terms. The benefits and detriments of coffee production are frequently described as affecting an entire country equally. There is little mention of the clash between growers, pickers, and government officials. Such descriptions homogenize complex situations and social relations that are central to the problems of coffee production.

The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center's web page describes the importance of coffee to the economies of Latin American countries in this monolithic way:

Shade coffee presents a tremendous opportunity for both conservation and economic gain, in that such a relatively benign form of agriculture has been and continues to be so significant an economic engine for the Latin American and Caribbean region... Revenues exceed 10 billion dollars per year. It is the second largest source of foreign exchange for developing countries around the world and is particularly important for Latin America and the Caribbean, where it is the leading source of foreign exchange.⁹

This description states that coffee is a "significant economic engine," a phrase that implies that it is a source of relative wealth. It omits the reasons why coffee is grown for foreign exchange at the expense of food crops for domestic consumption. It thus aligns itself with the belief that participation in global markets is not only good, but inevitable. It tacitly supports the contemporary debt structure regime by discussing coffee's importance as a source of foreign exchange without mentioning the reasons why these countries are so pressed to increase their foreign revenues: they need foreign dollars more than local food security. Further, it discusses coffee's historical

position as a source of wealth, omitting that this wealth benefited the plantation class while the hired (indigenous) labor was paid a pittance. The SMBC's representation also fails to mention that it is the small-scale coffee growers who create this source of foreign exchange used to pay off a debt that they themselves did not create. This omission makes coffee seem like a crop that benefits all people in producing countries equally.

Generalizations such as the SMBC's depoliticize the changes within coffee cultivation by obscuring the source of the pressures that cause growers to switch to technified coffee. The Rainforest Alliance describes contemporary Latin American agriculture in such a manner:

Often, endangered rainforests are cleared to make way for new or expanding farms, and diverse tropical ecosystems are replaced with sterile monocultures. Agriculture can threaten worker health and safety.¹⁰

"Agriculture" here is a term used to circumvent addressing who, and what, is changing agriculture into a system that threatens the health and safety of workers. The Rainforest Alliance ignores the reasons why cultivation is increasingly in monoculture, even though it concerns itself with the results of this conversion. There is no mention of the fact that the best land is reserved for export production, a situation which causes landless peasants to cut down rainforest in order to grow corn and beans. The conspicuous absence of any discussion of these pressures points to the Rainforest Alliance's unwillingness to incorporate political and economic realities into their worldview. The Thanksgiving Coffee website also describes the political and socioeconomic conditions of coffee growing areas in a way that obscures the agency of different interests and their unequal powers:

Many coffee producing nations are replacing their traditional

coffee trees with 'modern' coffee hybrids grown in full sun, and have higher yields through the use of heavy applications of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.¹¹

Just as the SMBC uses the country as the unit of analysis in its discussion of valuable export revenues, the above description of "nations" as replacing one growing system with another obscures both exactly who is switching, and their reasons for it. While the Thanksgiving Coffee Company claims that "higher yields" are the reason for the conversion, it ignores the architects of the market conditions that cause farmers to optimize yields above other considerations.

The above examples illustrate how the sustainable coffee discourse averts direct mention of national and international pressures at the root of coffee technification. Since the movement focuses on preserving what it calls the "traditional" agroforestry techniques of indigenous coffee farmers, an analysis of how it represents these farmers as a group is useful in making visible the movement's position within the global economic regime.

Peasant farmers are represented in the sustainable coffee discourse in two main ways: as lacking a social history (as having practiced certain farming techniques since time immemorial), and as players within a global economic system which they have not yet learned to exploit to their benefit.

The political uprisings among peasants are represented as an impediment to coffee production, and decontextualized from their goals of land redistribution that would benefit small-scale indigenous farmers. The Keynote Address at the First Sustainable Coffee Congress describes "traditional" farming practices in order to illustrate the type of cultivation that is increasingly being threatened:

We found that traditional, small-scale farmers often had a mosaic of farming systems: coffee, corn-bean-squash, sugarcane and other non-shade systems. Some also included domestic animals that grazed in the coffee plantations. These farmers invested a great amount of their own and their family's time to do the necessary management of their farms.¹²

The sustainable coffee movement bemoans the loss of this small-scale, integrated farming system. Yet this speaker does not address how to get farmers into a land-tenure position to replicate this type of agriculture. It is presented instead in a romanticized way, and the ubiquitous "traditional" makes it seem that the cultivation of sugarcane and coffee are indigenous to this area. Rather than viewing these agroforestry systems as testimony to the adaptability of peasant strategies, the speaker describes an idyllic scene of care and harmony. Another Congress speaker evokes the same dehistoricized picture of the small scale farm: "The traditional coffee production system uses a wide variety of dual-purpose shade trees for protecting the crop and providing food, energy, and additional income to the household."¹³ Again, the social evolution of an agroforestry system based on the production of subsistence crops and the cultivation of coffee for income is ignored. Instead, coffee is portrayed to be an inherent part of these farming practices. Such a representation obscures the complicated history of struggle for land and the economic and political position of peasants in their countries' economies. These descriptions naturalize the current indigenous cultivation practices by portraying them as inherent and fixed, rather than as calculated decisions made by people adapting their growing practices to help them stay on the land and stay fed.

The discourse also constitutes peasants as passive recipients in a global economic system that is portrayed as inherent and natural. Economic

situations are continually described as if they simply existed, rather than as the result of the conscious decisions and policies to benefit Northern agendas and institutions. An article in the *Economist* that favorably portrays the trend towards organic coffee farming in Costa Rica describes the conversion in the context of tough economic reality: "But, essentially, growers face the risk of all basic commodities: volatile prices, on a generally downward slope."¹⁴ (That's just the way it is.) The free market cheerleaders at the *Economist* who see the present state of commodity exchange as "essential" are echoed by the sustainable coffee promoters: the terms of commodity trade are represented as a given, and development is viewed as inevitable and good. In a speech on "Sustainable Coffee Production: Guatemala's Approach and Beyond" given at the Coffee Congress, the problem for peasants is that development and access to markets has not gone far enough:

Coffee is the main source of income for millions of rural inhabitants in the region. For this reason, it is vital that development continue in this area while bringing into play fundamental factors, such as preserving the environment and gaining access to international markets, and thus, progressively raise the living standard of this segment of the population.¹⁵

To raise the "living standards" of the rural Guatemalan populace, Arrivillaga prescribes their gaining access to international markets. This idea is in line with a half century's efforts by Northern countries to incorporate Southern ones into global economies based on our historical trajectory. More specifically, these recommendations for Guatemala are ironic because they do not come from the people they will supposedly benefit, and because they obscure that Central America has supplied cheap commodities to international markets since colonial times. It is a cruel suggestion, but a familiar one that aligns with powerful developmentalist beliefs. The first line

establishes the importance of coffee by mentioning it in terms of income. It is not questioned whether a heightened reliance on export income, rather than on subsistence farming or local markets, is what these peasants want. Neither does it take into account that the large-scale production of coffee may not be an inherent asset. Income is presented as the ultimate goal, a universal good, and the unequal terms of trade are not a factor under consideration.

Robert Rice of the SMBC is aware of the history of development programs in Latin America, yet sees them as having stopped short of reaching their goals, not as fundamentally misguided. He writes that

This situation with coffee production in the rural sector of Latin America has as its backdrop a half century of development efforts by the international (and national) community. We find, in fact, that the local, national, and international terms of trade and marketing channels remain unchanged-- often leaving rural producers in a more precarious position than they were several decades ago.¹⁶

Rice seems a little mystified by what he sees as a disjuncture: how can development efforts have failed to take these "channels" into account? He does not question the basis for development, or the historical constructions of Northerners who saw Latin American situations as inherently in need of specific types of "development." An alternate interpretation of the same phenomenon is a critique of the development paradigm, and takes into account that development goals and mechanisms were invented by Northerners who also benefited from these interventions.

The sustainable coffee discourse does not recognize the rift between the wealth of the United States and the poverty of coffee-growing areas as the result of specific, and unequal, economic and political relations between the two. An article that surveys the "sustainability revolution" sweeping the coffee industry points out that "It now includes those who are striving to give

economic stability to the indigenous farmers and laborers in impoverished, coffee-producing countries.”¹⁷ The word “give” used here is telling. It suggests a wealthy, kind patron acting out of philanthropic impulses in helping those who are inherently poor. This statement assumes that the “impoverished” state of coffee-producing areas is characteristic of the region, not the result of the current triumph of certain agendas. When poverty and development are naturalized and de-politicized in such a way, the ideas of justice and fairness are ironed out of the discourse.

Indeed, conflict and political insurgency are viewed by another Sustainable Coffee Congress speaker as obstacles to coffee production. Costa Rica is presented favorably due to its relative lack of rebellion:

In addition to a more flexible international market connection, Costa Rican coffee cultivation was favored by a relatively peaceful transition following independence, whereas destruction of property and expropriations in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala inhibited long-term investments there.¹⁸

Never mind that land may have been redistributed to peasants when expropriated from huge estates-- such things only serve to “inhibit” long-term investment. The speaker clearly views such investment as positive, though it is significantly less clear exactly whom it ultimately serves. Here long-term investment and low-risk coffee production are presented as inherently good, irrespective of the interests of the individual countries. Costa Rican production is described as “favored,” and its market connections as “more flexible,” terms which confer prestige and laudability, and at the same time imply that the other countries are somehow lacking and should follow Costa Rica’s shining example. The economic framework operating in this description assumes that more production for export is beneficial, and any political impediments to long-term investment are undesirable. The

irony here is that the speaker shows that land redistribution and peasants' increased access became obstacles to coffee production. Peasant farming and coffee production do not fit together in perfect economic harmony in this case-- in contrast to the picture painted so often by the sustainable coffee movement.

The discourse treats participation in the global market as a necessary given. But there are considerable differences in how the roles of governments of coffee-producing countries fit into the current and the desirable state of coffee production. Local governments are perceived alternately as unnecessary and unhelpful; as crucial actors in bringing about change; and as entirely outside of the sphere of interests regarding coffee production. All of these views of government, however, have in common the belief that economic development and increased participation in international markets should be increased, whether by governmental decree or by private sector initiative.

One market enthusiast at the First Sustainable Coffee Congress declared that "private sector solutions will offer a persuasive means to address the environmental challenges we face today."¹⁹ The way to accomplish this is, of course, to draw conservation into the economic arena by viewing it as an economic process and an asset. Rather than seeing private enterprise as motivated by the drive to increase profits, in this speaker's view it is only such projects that will ultimately benefit the environment and people of rural Latin America.

In contrast to this private-sector cure-all, Torres's speech "Outlook on Ecological Coffee Farming" takes the position that change is unlikely without a confluence of private enterprise and the support of governments. He states

that

It is obvious that the preservation of natural resources will not result from promoting abstract strategies alone, without any political commitment or connection to development plans.²⁰

What is obvious to Torres is the opposite of what is obvious to the private sector enthusiast: one believes government is necessary, and the other deems it unimportant in effecting change. They have in common, however, a belief in industrialization, in plans that aim to increase the participation of rural Latin American farmers in the international market. They agree that this would improve the lives of small-scale coffee farmers; their strategies merely differ.

Within the sustainable coffee movement, it is the roasters, marketers, and designers of certification criteria that have the least to say about the role of governments in effecting change in coffee-producing countries. Their literature is entirely devoid of mention of the political sphere. In response to being asked whether the sustainable coffee movement is trying to effect change through political, governmental, or policy avenues, Dahinda Meda of Royal Blue Organics simply replied "No."²¹

The sustainable coffee discourse discusses the United States government and the economic programs of multilateral lending agencies, yet presents their detrimental effects in a way that occludes the agency and interests of Northern banks and institutions. In this way, the US government and its interests are simultaneously acknowledged and ignored within the discourse. This representation relegates some of the most powerful forces affecting coffee production to the periphery. The sustainable coffee movement's disarticulation enables it to avoid confronting the fiscal policies of its own country, and continues to let it operate within the

developmentalist and free market ideologies. An article in *E* magazine repeatedly mentions the pressures to convert to sun coffee. Yet it omits naming the structural adjustment policies of the IMF that require increased yields for foreign exchange and the repayment of debt:

Even though the market is glutted with low-quality “industrial bulk” coffee from the vast, full-sun fields, many farmers with shaded farms are under tremendous economic pressure to either convert to full sun or sell out to developers. In the late 80s, when coffee prices were down, many producers razed their shaded farms and replaced them with sugar cane, cattle or plastic hothouses for ornamental plants.²²

Why were coffee prices down? The low prices were a result of the 1989 collapse of the quota system of the International Coffee Organization, a regulating body with members from producing and consuming countries. The quota system was abandoned in part due to the belief that quotas act as a restrictive impediment on free markets. In the above description, coffee prices were simply down, and coffee farmers are now simply under economic pressure. The US government and the international lending apparatus is present here, since they play a critical role in determining the economic pressures on Latin America, yet they remain unnamed.

The Sustainable Coffee Movement’s Proposed Solutions in Historical Context

In this section, I examine the context of the development-based solutions proposed by the sustainable coffee movement. I argue that its suggested programs perpetuate, or fail to address, the fundamental economic and development inequalities brought about by United States and international interventions. Instead, the history of these policies is glossed over, and the current economic and social aspects of Latin American reality

are presented as inherent to the region, rather than as shaped by specific agendas. The sustainable coffee discourse also assumes a level playing field by ignoring the history of foreign aid and development programs and their direct effects on the current conditions in coffee growing areas. As a consequence, their recommendations for change overlook the factors which need to be addressed directly if Latin American coffee production is to be contained from increased technification.

Gilberto Amaya of Appropriate Technology International sees the presence of middlemen ("coyotes") and rural producers' lack of access to processing facilities and marketing channels as the obstacles to sustainability in small-scale coffee production.

The majority of small-scale producers in Central America do not have access to processing facilities, despite the great capacity of existing *beneficios*- as the processing plants are known in Latin America. Since these producers also lack market information and commercialization techniques; most of them have to sell their coffee cherries unprocessed to intermediaries, or "coyotes," who pay them 30 to 50% below the local market price.²³

Given the above situation, Amaya concludes that the solution is to upgrade production techniques, and to help rural producers control the processing and even the international marketing of their coffee. Such proposals not only place vast expectations on small-scale farmers (he mentions that cooperatives must create images that attract faraway customers) but also take for granted that the origin of the problems described above is a lack of access to information. Amaya does not question the reasons why rural producers are being underpaid for their coffee cherries, and accordingly seeks to change their predicament by expecting them to perform all vertical functions of coffee production: growing, harvesting, processing, and even marketing.

However, the problems of peasants are not a lack of technology per se. The current situation with middlemen has become widespread only because of economic conditions that allowed them to flourish. The channels of trade which are profitable now are not inherent to coffee as a crop or as a commodity. All Latin American coffee producers were affected by the 1989 collapse of the quota system when Brazil and the United States decided not to renew it. As a result, the international market was glutted with an oversupply of coffee. For farmers this translated into a 50% cut in what they received for their beans. This drastic cut in price devastated producers, who could no longer afford to repay loans and thus had their property taken over by banks.²⁴ Since then, the price paid for coffee has continued to fluctuate.

The precarious situation growers find themselves in now is also due to the restructuring of the role of local governments. In Mexico, INMECAFE, the agency which regulated coffee production, granted credit to farmers, and stored coffee, was restructured at the same time that the quota system was disbanded. The result of these structural changes was that middlemen and foreign investors stepped into these newly vacant roles and made profits off the lack of regulation. Hernandez and Celis point out that

Storage and marketing have been organized, in part, by autonomous social organizations that have grown up in the free market juncture. But the largest portion of these functions have been taken over by reemerging middlemen and by large transnational companies.²⁵

Rather than simply being the victims of "coyotes" who skim profits off them, small producers are in this situation now in large part because governments have abdicated their responsibility to help them. Only in the void created by these adjustments have middlemen risen to prominence. Instead of recognizing this, Amaya conceives of the problem as one that can

be remedied by placing additional burdens on the producers. His view blames the victims, and is indicative of a belief that problems fundamentally caused by structural inequities can be solved by making more technology and know-how available to those people who the overall systems have been designed to marginalize.

This developmentalist view is also visible in his treatment of the flux of world coffee prices. Amaya relegates to a footnote that "the World Bank's Commodity Price Outlook report on its May 1996 issue forecasted a continued decline in coffee prices for 1997 and 1998."²⁶ Commodity prices are presented as a natural condition to become acclimated to, as a reality free from anybody's design, befalling coffee farmers just like the weather. Instead of locating the center of the problem in the degree of power exercised by institutions such as the World Bank, Amaya relegates this "forecast" to the margins and tacitly accepts it without question.

In an article on "The Struggle for Control of a Commodity Chain: Instant Coffee From Latin America," John Talbot analyzes a case in which the industrialization of exports and other value-added activities undertaken by producing countries does not lead to greater profits. His observations about instant coffee lend a cautionary note to Amaya's suggestions. A vertical integration of the phases of coffee production does not cause significant change unless accompanied by structural changes of international trade and price controls, he concludes. Talbot writes:

Three Latin American countries-- Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador-- have become significant exporters of instant coffee, but the benefits they have realized from this effort have been limited by the control exercised by transnational corporations over the global production system....The main obstacle faced by these exporters was ultimately not technological. Rather, it arose from the advertising expenditures, brand names, and distribution channels controlled by the transnational

corporations.²⁷

The sustainable coffee movement places a heavy emphasis on what the producers of coffee themselves must do to benefit from growing coffee in small scale, shaded farms. It seeks to circumvent existing channels of distribution by recommending solutions such as the certification of coffee as organic, fair trade, bird friendly, etc. The idea is to build trust between the buyers of coffee and the growers, who receive a premium from roasters buying directly from them. But ignoring that their projects still operate under macroeconomic policies and political and economic conditions in their own countries, will ultimately make the sustainable coffee movement's programs ineffective in the long term.

Especially conspicuous by its absence is the issue of quotas. It is missing in the pamphlets, web pages, and articles about sustainable coffee, yet an understanding of the importance of quotas is central to the coffee situation in Latin America. A quota system is a direct way to limit production, and thus dampen the rush towards increased yields and expansion of areas under cultivation. Since the technification of coffee is alarming to sustainable coffee promoters, their silence on this topic is significant.

Just as the discourse fails to mention the importance of quotas in limiting the spread of sun coffee plantations, it also dismisses the history of the United States' financial backing of the current trends towards technification. The problem with this omission is not only that the sustainable coffee movement fails to consider the history of their own country's involvement, but that it also ignores contemporary policies towards Latin America that perpetuate the pressures towards modernization.

A few sustainable coffee promoters mention the role of the United

States Agency for International Development's (USAID) financial backing of technification in the 1970s. Yet their treatment of this issue does not connect past initiatives to current policies that still favor increasing yields for export. In short, the few times USAID's role in technification is mentioned in the discourse relegates it to a faraway time. This stance has the effect of positioning the current role of the US government and multilateral lending agencies to the periphery, when in fact they are central players in determining the current state of Latin American agricultural production.

In their white paper *Coffee, Conservation and Coffee in the Western Hemisphere*, Rice and Ward dedicate one page to the role of USAID's role in technification. They mention that \$80 million was given to programs focused on "renovating" production in order to increase yields. As recently as 1989, a project in Guatemala was described in the following way by USAID:

Existing coffee plantings are typically old, low-density plantings which suffer from disease and insect problems, lack proper nutrition, are unpruned and heavily shaded. These conditions and practices greatly restrict yields and reduce productivity. In order to effectively utilize proven production practices which consistently yield 30 or more cwt. per manzana, it is necessary to completely remove the present plantings and introduce new varieties and a technical package of inputs and procedures which farmers -- through extension, education, and training -- can readily employ.²⁸

Rice and Ward's description of USAID's role obfuscates the political and economic motivations behind these programs. Their treatment of the issue is a short introduction, followed by two quotations (including the one above), and ends with a paragraph that shifts its focus away from the United States. Instead, Rice and Ward mention repeatedly that these programs were welcomed by the targeted countries. They mention the "popularity and enthusiastic embrace" of these programs by agricultural extension agents and

“researchers”-- but omit the reaction of small growers and the effects technification had on rural areas. The section ends with the note that even Nicaragua’s agricultural advisors were “enamored” with technification. Rice and Ward’s message here is essentially ‘Well, our country did this, but they wanted it anyway.’ Rather than admitting the destruction of shade plantations is in large part due to their own country’s programs, Rice and Ward’s description is couched in justifications and excuses.

In a speech at the Sustainable Coffee Congress, Rice again mentions the role of USAID along with Mexico’s and Colombia’s governmental programs that also heavily promoted technification.²⁹ To his credit, Robert Rice is the only sustainable coffee promoter to actually address these issues. However, he fails to address the reasons why the governments of coffee producing countries were attracted to the possibility of higher yields. An increase in coffee production was seen by them as a possible way to repay their massive foreign debt. The conditions of repayment were and continue to be set by the Inter-American Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund, institutions left unnamed by Rice as crucial actors in determining the priorities of Latin American governmental spending. Further, Rice states that the initial reason behind USAID’s technification programs was the need to combat leaf rust, a fungal disease that was seen as a threat to coffee trees planted in shade. It is an open question to what extent the leaf rust was ever really a threat, but the above quotation regarding Guatemalan production illustrates that increased yields were consistently a central factor in determining USAID’s programs.

The sustainable coffee movement’s description of the causes of technification tacitly remove the United States foreign aid programs from any blame, and conveniently ignore the lessons of the Green Revolution with

other crops. The solutions prescribed by the movement operate in a historical void: while it is eager to design solutions that aim to benefit small producers, this movement is not concerned with the political and economic forces that shape the current plight of rural people in Latin America. When asked what he knew about the role of United States aid programs for technification in the 1970s, one of the owners of Royal Blue Organics, an Oregon-based importer of coffee from a Chiapas producers' cooperative, answered "Zilch."³⁰

Such oversight of the historical context of coffee production is sobering. It becomes even more significant when one considers that similar factors are still affecting the growing, distribution, and profit structures of coffee. The IMF's structural adjustment policies have a direct impact on Latin American agriculture. The Bretton Woods institutions (the World Bank and the IMF) set the terms of loans and repayments, yet are not accountable themselves to any democratically elected governments or agencies. Korten points out that

Although the Bretton Woods institutions are designated specialized agencies of the United Nations, they are far more important and powerful than other specialized UN agencies and reject any UN effort to coordinate or oversee their activities.³¹

Perhaps since the sustainable coffee movement is so focused on market-oriented solutions, it fails to see that a critique of current debt structures is essential to an understanding of the changes occurring in coffee production. The sustainable coffee discourse is full of references to democracy, the dignity of small producers, and the plight of future generations. Yet without an interest in what is actually occurring politically and economically at larger levels, the discourse's mention of these factors amounts to little more than references to abstract ideals.

The structural adjustment policies imposed on Latin American

governments in the 1980s and '90s had disastrous consequences for peasant producers. Countries were forced to produce for export and increase their yields, and governmental programs shifted to implement these changes.³² Staple food production became increasingly difficult, and poverty increased. In order to comply with the mandates of the lending institutions, governments implemented policies that were fundamentally at odds with environmental sustainability.³³

The fact that the sustainable coffee movement wholeheartedly ignores this macroeconomic and political context illustrates that this movement is itself an outgrowth of the developmentalist paradigm, perhaps with an environmental and social justice shine. I am not arguing that the global debt situation has to be solved or overhauled in some way before meaningful action can be taken. In pointing out the omissions within the sustainable coffee movement, however, my purpose is to examine the images and narratives that have shaped it. The lack of attention it gives to structural adjustment and other such policies illustrates that the sustainable coffee movement does not question them. Instead, it locates its recommendations for change within a developmentalist framework that addresses the symptoms of problems rather than what I and others view as causes. In doing this, sustainable coffee efforts spearheaded by American NGOs and private roasters operate within a framework that accepts the current terms of trade and unequal relations between Southern producers and Northern consumers. It seeks to affect fundamental changes in the producing sector but in fact maintains a comfortable position of relative power in the exchange.

"Sustainable Development" Programs and Coffee Production

The sustainable coffee discourse sets forth recommendations placed under a framework of “sustainable development.” This term has been used frequently by environmental groups as well as by development agencies; whether the coffee discourse picked it up from dominant institutions or from other movements is inconsequential. However, it is a term that requires some analysis, because it has become widespread and used to appeal to concerns about the environmental or social consequences of certain programs. It functions as a sort of shield: when a project is called “sustainable” by its architects, this term deflects scrutiny of actual questions of sustainability. A generally accepted definition of sustainability comes from the Bruntland report, the World Commission on Environment and Development: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”³⁴ The language of this definition is vague; it is easy to claim that a project meets these criteria. Dore points out that “within this framework environmentalists and politicians have rarely explored the connections between property relations, political power, and environmental destruction.”³⁵ The idea of sustainable development does not address ideas of justice, unequal distribution of resources, or control over political decisions. As such, it is a concept that can be massaged to firmly support the status quo in its omission of these crucial issues.

Anything can be called sustainable development by this definition, and the promotion of agricultural production for export is no exception. The Specialty Coffee Organization of America, a trade group of importers, roasters, and marketers of high quality whole bean coffees, recently added “sustainability” to its mission statement. Tacked on as an additional goal, sustainability amounts to little more than lip service. Indeed, the SCAA’s

treatment of the issue is laughably vague, a mere list of ideals with no plans or policies to implement their stated goals. Among these are "To recognize resource interdependence. To eliminate habitat destruction. To eliminate water and air pollution. To respect the sovereignty of countries. To encourage the sensitivity to the maintenance of cultures."³⁶ Now that the SCAA has agreed that it both understands and "supports" sustainability, it has evidently done what it can. How exactly the SCAA will work towards, for example, eliminating air pollution while still buying coffee shipped across the Western hemisphere is not a concern for them. The idea of sustainability has taken precedence over actions taken towards actual practices that are fair to people and low-impact on the environment.

More than just sustainability alone, sustainable development is deemed a laudable goal by everyone from trade groups to conservationists. Whether or not it is an oxymoron is debated by environmental purists who see all human activity as negative. The pairing of the two words, however, does suggest something significant: development unquestioned. When tacked to programs aimed at Third World countries that have seen development program fads come and go, "sustainable development" seems little more than a band-aid allowing continued destruction with a superficial nod to the criticism from environmentalists.

The term "underdeveloped" is used frequently to describe rural communities in Latin America. The discourse of development is so ingrained in how we perceive phenomena that it is difficult for Northerners to articulate a desire for change in Third World countries without relying on its narrative claims. Regarding Northern views of the Amazon, Fisher writes:

The 'discourse of development' is not only understood as a discourse that contains specific modernizing prescriptions for economic progress; it is above all, a way of perceiving that is

largely taken for granted. This mode of perception is so ingrained that it colors the act of environmental description and shapes our commonsense contemporary acceptance of the connection between 'Indianness' and ecology.³⁷

The sustainable coffee discourse articulates its solutions within this developmentalist narrative, and as a consequence misses the political and social heart of the changes affecting the lives of small scale coffee farmers. Promoters of sustainable development in coffee growing regions offer solutions that romanticize indigenous people and their relation to the land. At the same time, the projects operate in a contextual void. They aim to change the lot of rural farmers through the dissemination of technological know-how and through isolated projects that ignore the political dimensions, and thus the roots, of the problems they seek to address.

Coffee Kids, a Rhode Island-based nonprofit, focuses on improving the quality of life in rural Latin American areas that grow coffee. Its agenda is broadly humanitarian, and its strategies aim to improve the situations of individual towns and families. Projects such as the development of a solar coffee dryer for communities in Honduras and Costa Rica, and the development of solar-powered water purifiers for areas in Mexico and Guatemala, have the stated purpose of increasing the targeted communities' power of "self-determination." Bill Fishbein, the President of Coffee Kids, states that "We prefer to look at long-term changes through small, personal projects based on trust built through a slow, deliberate process."³⁸ This language is seemingly apolitical, and does not try to address the larger socio-economic contexts of the areas they are interesting in helping.

Coffee Kids' motto of "Community Development, Careful Compassion: Grounds for Hope" is reflected in their programs, which try to effect change by treating each situation as an isolated, unfortunate

circumstance best helped by individual projects. Coffee Kids' help in "developing" rural coffee growing areas is divorced from an understanding of the larger context of governmental policy and international trade structures that have caused much of the poverty of these areas. By isolating the problems within rural areas and treating them on a case-by-case basis, Coffee Kids's approach relegates the causes of rural poverty to the margins. In doing so, its approach is in line with classic developmentalist solutions, which "attempt to manage the evident poverty and inequality in the periphery by isolating the causes of these conditions to the periphery."³⁹ Coffee Kids' projects are presented as an example of sustainable development: they seek to, through technological innovation aimed at individual "cases," improve the living conditions in rural areas in a way that minimizes impact on the environment. Projects such as these are the norm in the sustainable coffee movement's attempts to help indigenous producers.

Solutions are designed to offer an alternative market for the products of "sustainable development" projects, and thus are implemented on a micro level. As such, they do not attempt to change the pressures faced by rural producers in Latin America as a whole, but concentrate instead on individual communities. A Sustainable Coffee Congress participant describes the operations of PROAFT, an NGO:

We are searching for alternative development schemes at a micro level that will be sensible to the local culture and biodiversity conservation and most of all to the needs and aspirations of the people for a better quality of life.... Our program works with the participants to help them find markets for their products.⁴⁰

Programs such as these can help individual communities, but they also place them in the precarious position of relying, once again, on price

fluctuations over which they have little control. The attempt to concoct alternative development schemes is still operating within the development paradigm: it accepts the larger political and economic contexts responsible for making it necessary for rural producers to focus on export crops. In suggesting that niche markets such as organic foods are a way to foster sustainable agricultural production, these programs ask communities to actually decrease their "self-determination." Rural producers' reliance on the stability of the desire for their products in distant markets over which they ultimately have no control is considered "sustainable." Further, sustainability seems not to require ongoing and persistent efforts to politicize the kinds of structural questions raised in this chapter. "Sustainable development" efforts regard these questions as dispensable or worthless.

A similar strategy is echoed by another Congress participant, who regards the question of sustainability in coffee production in the following way:

Coffee production systems that include the concept of sustainability in their design have one basic technical objective: to empower producers to self-regulate and practice self-sufficient farming.⁴¹

This definition is oddly vacuous, because it fails to define its terms: how are producers to self-regulate? What is to be regulated-- the prices of coffee, or how much to grow? And what is meant by self-sufficient farming-- the lack of governmental credit programs and support? How can coffee farming be self-sufficient when prices are determined in centers of power in distant places? Significantly, the goals of sustainability are described as "technical" ones, thus once again marginalizing questions of power and politics. The above description of sustainability could have just as well come

from a free market, pro-NAFTA enthusiast as from someone committed to environmental protection and social justice. The discourses of these disparate groups are so similar because the sustainable coffee movement has adopted the thought, and hence language, of economists to stake its claims. Dore points out the consequences of environmentalists accepting the discourse of dominant institutions:

To retain credibility, and prevent exclusion from the corridors of power, environmentalists framed issues of sustainability in terms acceptable to the agencies. Instead of the environmental movement transforming the priorities of the multilateral agencies, the reverse occurred. The agenda of the World Bank and the IMF-- export promotion, free markets, a small state-- became the central issues in the environmental debate.⁴²

The adoption of market-oriented strategies results in the perpetuation of economic inequalities characteristic of the system of global agricultural trade. Even though the purpose of the sustainable coffee movement is ostensibly to encourage the maintenance of biodiversity- friendly coffee production and the viability of small scale farmers, the avenues of trade and marketing that they have followed ultimately result in benefiting the marketers of sustainable coffee to a greater extent than the producers. I believe that this result is unintentional. Yet it is inevitable as well, since the movement fails to take into account that it still operates within a system structured in a way that favors retailers and marketers more than the growers of coffee.

The roasters, marketers, and retailers of sustainable coffee operate within the larger context of the United States economy. They are subject to the same pressures as other businesses, socially and environmentally

conscious or not. Since sustainable coffee is shipped, sold, and advertised in the same ways as conventional products, it must compete under the same conditions as other products in the marketplace.

These market conditions have resulted in several interesting shifts within the sustainable coffee movement. All of them illustrate that the retailing aspect of the sustainable coffee movement is motivated by the same logic as other businesses. Mergers abound in the industry, and people are getting rich off environmentally-friendly coffee. A news nugget in *Coffee & Cocoa International* reports that "David Griswold, founder and president of Sustainable Harvest Coffee Co., has acquired all equity in the company." He had bought the stock held by Thanksgiving Coffee "for an undisclosed amount," and sales this year "are projected to reach \$2.3 million."⁴³

This tidbit reads just like the latest news of mergers in any other industry, and for good reason. Griswold is clearly finding a healthy profit in his import business. With sales of the three-year old company reaching millions of dollars, the concept of sustainability is clearly a marketing niche. Sustainable Harvest never advertised itself as a not-for-profit company, yet the manner in which Griswold conducts his business speaks volumes about his priorities. To simply dismiss him as a hypocrite and opportunist, however, misses the complexity of the situation.

This buyout is only one within a larger trend in the specialty coffee industry. It illustrates that the sustainable coffee movement occupies a niche within specialty coffees, rather than existing as a separate movement. As gourmet coffees continue to infiltrate every corner of the United States, company buyouts are proliferating. Recent buyouts in the retail sphere include Torrefazione, recently bought by Seattle's Best Coffee, which is in turn owned by AFC; Starbucks is buying out small stores all over; Procter and

Gamble recently bought Millstone (which has an organic line); and Gloria Jean's and Coffee People (actually one company) were recently purchased by the Canada-based Second Cup.⁴⁴ The current image of the preponderance of small roasters and retailers may soon be replaced with the Starbucks-ization of America. The sustainable coffee niche is no exception to this trend, as Griswold's story illustrates. What does it tell us about the ability of the sustainable coffee movement to effect change through development and market-oriented solutions?

Roasters and retailers inevitably make more money than the direct producers of coffee. A few calculations illustrate that even if roasters buy beans according to fair trade guidelines, they can easily sell their coffee for several dollars more per pound than other gourmet coffees. The 30 cent premium per pound that is realized by farmers is made up for by the fact that fair trade coffees, advertised as such, often sell for more than \$10 a pound. Fair trade companies guarantee a minimum floor price no matter how low the price of coffee sinks in commodity trading.⁴⁵ However, there is no maximum set for how much the companies themselves can profit from selling fair trade or otherwise certified coffee. Standard premiums paid for organic coffee are 10 cents a pound. Royal Blue Organics pay 40 to 60 cents premium on each pound of coffee that they purchase from the ISMAM cooperative in Chiapas.⁴⁶ They pay an average price of \$1.96 a pound for coffee, well above the 50 to 80 cents that small-scale producers of high quality beans usually see. Yet Royal Blue also sells these coffees for \$11 a pound, not including shipping and handling. Even though they pay producers substantially more than other importers do, their position within the dynamic ensures that they themselves can profit from selling coffee just as much as conventional importers, since the consumers absorb the bulk of the

cost. Operating within conventional market conditions, the sustainable coffee movement profits while “doing good.”

Is such a method of working for social and environmental change viable in the long term? Is it possible to continue businesses practices that have a social/environmental conscience within the larger arena of competition in the marketplace? Can the sustainable coffee movement function within the dominant economic context of market pressures or tendencies such as those that have caused the merger between Thanksgiving and Sustainable Harvest? From a theoretical perspective, the chances are slim. The logic of the market, with competition as the primary rule, inherently makes “sustainability” a constraint. Vandermeer and Perfecto note that

rational planning is not anticipated at either national or international levels, while development will proceed fastest for those able to ignore constraints others either cannot or will not ignore. Sustainability is precisely such a constraint.⁴⁷

The sustainable coffee movement’s products are at a disadvantage in a free market system characterized by the absence of legal measures that rein in the drive to heighten productivity and become more competitive. Can this movement transform (or even politicize) coffee production and consumption? Or is it consigned to becoming a niche market, to failure, or to eventual absorption?

Market-Oriented Solutions in the Sustainable Coffee Discourse

The sustainable coffee promoters base their movement of environmental and social change on market-oriented programs. Despite the

possible dangers of such an approach, many participants in this movement are enthusiastic about the potential role markets play in sustainable agriculture. As discussed earlier, such faith in international trade is characteristic of the developmentalist paradigm. The solutions prescribed by sustainable coffee promoters overall privilege the goals that Northern institutions deem important: participation in the global economy.

Evident in much of the discourse is the historic belief since the time of Adam Smith in the ability of markets to self regulate according to their own internal logic. Solutions prescribed out of this belief continue the philosophic optimism of neoliberal ideas, and avoid an empirical analysis of the past, present, and future effects of global trade on the land and people involved in small scale farming in Latin America.

One Sustainable Coffee Congress speaker, a representative of the Washington- based Conservation International, noted that "Sustainable production is irrelevant- indeed impossible- without markets."⁴⁸ Besides the fact that "sustainability" is an elusive process to define, this speaker assumes that he knows not only what sustainable production is, but also that it is impossible without market participation. Throughout his speech, he alludes to the positive nature of markets. He assumes that markets are characterized by fixed qualities, rather than created and maintained by a complex set of economic, political, and social forces. Indeed, it is difficult for him to see conservation as operating outside of the sphere of market participation, so great is his belief that economic incentives are inevitably tied to responsible use of land and life forms. He declares that "In many cases, the markets we need do not exist."⁴⁹ The possibility of conceiving of values and incentives for non-destructive resource use not based on profits, is not considered.

Another commentator at the Coffee Congress, a representative of the

Mesoamerican Development Institute Corporation (based in Massachusetts), echoes the faith in the role of markets as critical to sustainability. It is significant that these speakers do not treat market incentives as necessary due to the current economic climate and the power of neoliberal beliefs. Rather than strategizing in relation to markets as a necessary tactic, these speakers believe market-based solutions are always the best way to go. Their suggestions are market-oriented not for pragmatic reasons, but for philosophical ones. Positive aspects and characteristics of coffee growing are measured in economic terms:

Concepts like plant and animal diversity have to be internalized into the production cost and consumer education as to the true economic value of addressing this concept of sustainability. For this education to bear any sense of reality, these issues should have a market value and a real place in the production/cost analysis.⁵⁰

There is no questioning of the global economic system apparent here. It is accepted in this speech as natural and good. Sustainable coffee promotion largely takes place in this realm of private sector cure-alls and the idea that more products and markets means more progress. Rather than calling for limits to the forces that seek to commodify, count, and value everything in purely economic terms, the sustainable coffee discourse has joined the ranks of those who proclaim that economic value is the only value. Its narratives therefore expand to further draw people and places into a system which represents them according to its own logic: financial gain or loss are the only values such a paradigm can recognize.

An article in *Grassroots Development* entitled "The Struggle For the Forest: Conservation and Development in the Sierra Juarez" exemplifies the attitude of the sustainable coffee movement, if in harsher terms:

Comaltepec's leaders and citizens must find a way to successfully manage their community's entry into the global economy in the last decade of the twentieth century; in doing so, they must decide whether it will be as coffee farmers, timber producers, forest stewards-- or maids and construction workers in Santa Monica.⁵¹

The arrogance of this statement lies in its smug assumption that entry into the global economy is not a choice, but a necessity. The "global economy" as represented here simply exists, divorced from the interests and plans of those who determine the terms of trade and benefit from them. Options presented to the people of Comaltepec systematically ignore any agency or will on their part. They are presented as active participants in their own fate only to the extent that they have a choice of which of the presented scenarios they will pick. The very creation of these options to begin with is left out of the picture by the author. Similarly ignored is the right of the people of the Sierra Juarez to choose how to conceptualize and form their lives and livelihood.

Socioeconomic Aspects of Coffee Production Ignored in the Sustainable Coffee Movement's Representations and Programs

By representing Latin American coffee production in terms that privilege developmentalist narratives and neoliberal, market-based solutions, the sustainable coffee movement averts its attention from other critical factors that play a significant role in the changes occurring in coffee production. Two such critical perspectives that its discourse misses are the concept of food security and the politics of agricultural production. These other approaches are rendered unspeakable in the sustainable coffee discourse

since they cannot be articulated within a strictly economics-oriented paradigm. But they represent a field of knowledge that has existed and expanded since criticism of the Green Revolution began in the mid-1970s.

The sustainable coffee movement approaches the problems of biodiversity erosion and poverty in coffee-growing areas with the assumption that coffee is an inherent part of the Latin American agricultural and social landscape. Since its discourse is based in development-oriented views of Third World countries, it assumes that coffee is an asset to all Latin Americans simply because it contributes to export earnings. These two assumptions make it possible for the discourse to avoid an analysis from the perspective of food security.

The idea of primarily subsistence milpa production of staple food crops carries much weight among the rural populace in coffee-growing areas. Property rights are considered by many to be the foundation of stability and a better life. Rigoberta Menchu, in her famous autobiography, states that "We started thinking about the roots of the problem and came to the conclusion that everything stemmed from the ownership of land."⁵² Access to land, and legal rights to secure such access, have been and continue to be central issues in the agrarian politics of Latin America. With the promotion of sustainable coffee, environmentalists have failed to take into account one of the most important aspects of rural Latin America. Since they focus primarily on small-scale farmers who already own their land, their programs ignore the larger context of the increased conversion of land for export-oriented, monocrop agriculture. Cristobal Kay, in charting agricultural development in rural Latin America, writes that

Latin America's agricultural resource base is increasingly directed toward satisfying the demands of local high-income urban consumers as well as foreign markets. The emphasis

placed by the TNCs on production for export and/or on crops for high-income consumers has created a new world food regime.⁵³

Viewed from a food security standpoint, the question of coffee production emerges from a different angle: it becomes one of how to deal with growing an export crop and all the complexities that come with it. In many cases, coffee farms are in direct opposition to land tenure goals. A food security position does not view value as arising primarily out of financial gains, while the narratives of sustainable coffee promotion find value as ultimately measurable only in economic terms. The sustainable coffee movement therefore wants to financially reward small-scale growers for their responsible land use practices, but it fails to see how critical political changes involving land redistribution would ultimately have a larger impact on biodiversity enhancement and local self-determination.

The sustainable coffee movement's silence about the 1994 EZLN rebellion in Chiapas is indicative of its failure to take on the politics of agriculture in Latin America. Many sustainable coffee programs operate in Chiapas, but the rebellion has only been mentioned in the context of its untimely interruption of bird research and its negative effects on coffee cooperatives.⁵⁴ This lack of engagement with the rebellion is testimony to the unwillingness of the sustainable coffee movement to conceptualize Latin American rural struggle in terms other than those that serve their interests and are in their own area of expertise. The rebellion addressed the same critical issues as the sustainable coffee movement: the destruction of land in export-oriented agriculture, peasant access to land, and questions of international trade.

The sustainable coffee movement will not recognize a directly relevant series of events, with attendant global media coverage, because its narrow

agenda systematically excludes any interest in the larger contexts within which they want to effect change. The New Years' Day 1994 rebellion coincided with the implementation of NAFTA, which was seen by the Zapatistas as a trade agreement that would further the integration of their land and labor into the global economy on exploitive terms. The rebels protested the dropping of Article 27 of the Mexican constitution that NAFTA signaled: previously communally held and farmed ejidos were now open to sale. George Collier believes that the Zapatistas were "first and foremost calling attention to the plight of Mexico's rural poor and peasants," a cause which the sustainable coffee movement supposedly concerns itself with as well.⁵⁵

What then explains the lack of interest in this rebellion? It was a declaration of war, inherently political, and the sustainable coffee movement sidesteps politics in its programs that claim to be simply good causes. The primary goal of this movement, saving biodiversity by encouraging shade plantations, is presented as a timeless goal above "political" situations. As was discussed in Chapter Two, biodiversity conservation is represented as an apolitical concern working under extreme time pressure for the benefit of all humanity. Since the sustainable coffee movement seeks to effect change through market-oriented policies (a neoliberal idea represented as logical and value-neutral), it refuses to see the direct relevance of the uprising. The Chiapas rebels "intended that the armed rebellion would be the spark needed to renew the country's nationalist, populist, and agrarian traditions at a time when the government was replacing these traditions with neoliberal policies"-- goals fundamentally at odds with the orientation of the sustainable coffee movement.⁵⁶ The promotion of biodiversity-friendly coffee in the marketplace, the certification of organic and shade grown, and fair trade

measures all function under the same assumption: increased foreign trade can be used to effect positive social and environmental change. The Zapatista rebellion was a rebellion against increased international trade, which had hurt the peasants of Chiapas far more than it had ever helped them.⁵⁷

The sustainable coffee movement remains ignorant of these detrimental consequences of international trade because they are on the consuming side, on the side that benefits. Their belief that development and increased market participation are solutions to poverty allow them to avoid an engagement with the actual consequences that result from the implementation of such development policies.

Aligned with its avoidance of food security and land tenure positions is the sustainable coffee discourse's silence about the profoundly political conflicts of agricultural production in Latin America over the last three decades. In its focus on exclusively small-scale shade plantations, the movement ignores that the vast amount of coffee production is exploitive of labor. Within its recommendations, there is no room for the articulations of political struggles of workers on large coffee plantations. In 1995 in Soconusco, an agricultural area in Chiapas near the Pacific Ocean, coffee workers protested against the wealth and power of a local Latino coffee baron. In a rally against the Chiapas State Coffee Producers Union, they demanded that their concerns about corruption, working conditions, and environmental health be addressed.⁵⁸ The United States/Guatemala Labor Education Project has been raising awareness of the horrible working conditions on Starbucks plantations over the last few years.⁵⁹ Events such as these are not mentioned by the sustainable coffee movement; they are outside of its sphere of interest. This movement's lack of interest in labor issues is indicative of its unwillingness to address the fundamentally political nature of coffee

production. In concentrating solely on maintaining shade plantations through market-based solutions, the sustainable coffee discourse sidesteps any involvement in calling for structural changes that would truly change coffee production to benefit small farmers and the environment in Latin America.

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Chapter Four
Consuming to Save the Forest:
The Sustainable Coffee Discourse and the Role of Northerners

Introduction

The sustainable coffee movement sees the site of production as in need of specific changes: revamped, environmentally-friendly growing practices and increased participation in global markets. This chapter focuses on the sustainable coffee discourse's vision of how coffee drinkers in the United States fit into its goals. The discourse conceives of the role of Northerners in regards to coffee production first and foremost as consumers. It represents the arena of consumption as the obvious route through which to effect change in coffee growing practices. Roasters, retailers, and environmental organizations involved in the sustainable coffee movement echo each other's beliefs. It is both hoped and believed that through buying power, coffee drinkers will change production techniques by supporting certified organic or shade grown coffees.

This chapter surveys how the sustainable coffee movement emphasizes consumption as a method of social or political action to the exclusion of other tactics. Paul Katzeff of Thanksgiving Coffee Company displays a belief common in the discourse of environmental coffee promotion:

Certified organically grown coffee is to coffee what the boycott is to politics. It is a clearly defined focal point that needs no explanation. It is what it stands for. The ability to create a clear focal point that masses of the market can understand without

explanation is what creates a movement both politically (if that is your goal) or in marketing (if sales is your goal).¹

How did consumerism come to occupy such a central and unquestioned role? What are the paradigms, value systems, and implicit beliefs that make consumerism seem a plausible solution to changing coffee production trends? What meanings and functions does consumer activism create in our self-perception? How does it inform our view of our own place within the dynamic of exchange? How does it shape our conceptual relation to coffee growers? What are the consequences of approaching change through exclusively consumer-oriented solutions? These questions beg for exploration if we hope to understand the relation between environmental movements, agriculture, and the authority Northerners feel within the dynamics of production, trade, and consumption of Third World commodities.

The power of the idea of consumption as a way of effecting political change is apparent to me when I buy coffee. Why do I feel better about buying shade grown or fair trade coffee when I go to the store? Despite my recognition of the problematics intrinsic to coffee, I drink it on a daily basis. My attitude about my own consumption of coffee is often an ironic stance, common to Americans who are aware of their own position within global economic structures while necessarily still participating in them. Beyond taking refuge in such an attitude, however, is another view that is more complex, and more serious: the fact that when I buy certified coffee of any sort, I actually do feel better for "supporting" environmental farming practices, fair trade, or shade cover. It is this attitude's influence that is the subject of this chapter. "Supporting" certain types of production techniques has come to mean financially supporting them. On one hand, it is logical that my purchase of a one-pound bag of Organic Chiapas Dark roast beans from

Montana Coffee Traders supports both the labor of a farm in Mexico that does not poison its cooperative members, as well as a roaster that supplies jobs in a relatively poor state in this country. My money goes to these businesses, rather than to Procter & Gamble or Philip Morris if I had bought a can of Yuban or Maxwell House at Safeway.

But there is more to the situation than my purchase of a bag of coffee. The sustainable coffee discourse's exclusive focus on financial "support" has the effect of marginalizing other ways of conceiving of affecting change in coffee production. By recommending change in consumer behavior to the exclusion of other changes more directly political and social in nature, the sustainable coffee movement taps into the dominant American self-conception of what it means to exist in the world. I seek to unpack the meanings we ascribe to consumer power, to analyze its implications, and to render more visible the reasons why consumption has come to occupy a central role in movements calling for environmental change.

The Sustainable Coffee Movement's View of Consumers as the Solution

Popular articles about sustainable coffee, environmental groups, and roasters concerned about migratory bird habitat all regard consumer awareness as the focal point in curtailing further coffee technification. The discourse is certain that once consumers are educated, they will inevitably use their purchasing power to support sustainably-grown coffee. Elizabeth Skinner of the Rainforest Alliance suggests that once the "value of shade coffee" is properly understood, consumers should be "able to vote for conservation in the marketplace."² She makes several logical jumps in the

course of her argument. First, she occludes the gap between an awareness of the environmental aspects of coffee production and consumer behavior in making purchasing decisions based on this knowledge. This assumption is followed with her representation of the idea of consumption as a natural form of political action, her use of the metaphor "vote." Citing a consumer research report, she states that

there exists a giant and activist market that wants to use its purchasing power to help the environment... 83 percent of consumers have changed their shopping habits to protect the environment.³

By conceiving of Americans as solely existing in the realm of consumption, Skinner's recommendations for how we can effect change in coffee cultivation ignores both the half of the American population that does not drink coffee, and the possibility of effecting change through political or legal avenues. Her call for exclusively consumption-related action would be seen as ridiculous in other environmental movements, such as the movement for sustainable logging in the United States. But her view takes for granted that U.S. citizens can only change the production systems of a Latin American agricultural commodity by adjusting our consumer behavior.

The Thanksgiving Coffee Company's web page displays the same conviction, if in more nonsensical terms: "Consumers can influence the coffee debate, not just through the purchases they make, but by their demand for a 'just cup' each morning."⁴ A 'just cup,' it turns out, is one certified as organic by Thanksgiving. What is their message to coffee drinkers? Do not only make your voice heard through buying power alone-- do it by buying specifically our organic coffee. The wording of Thanksgiving's statement displays that consumers can do many things, but upon scrutiny it turns out that all of our options as citizens of an importing country are limited to

selecting one product over another.

While considerable discord exists over exactly how to promote sustainable coffee in the marketplace, it is this targeted site of change that is universally assumed to be the fitting focus. "The nub of the dispute," an article in *Science* explains, is "how to promote bird-friendly coffee in the marketplace."⁵ Full emphasis is given to how, not if, consumption is the best locus for change.

An article in *Sierra* magazine, "Habitat-Saving Habit," reduces all the complexities of coffee production and its consequences to the role of consumers, as its title implies. The representation of coffee drinkers in this article warrants scrutiny. Choosing sustainable coffee is viewed as a further benefit to coffee drinkers: "We can get a lot more out of our daily dose: protecting tropical habitat, and improving the lives of those who grow our beloved beans."⁶ Not only can we get more, the author implies, but we deserve to get more, to heroically save faraway habitat and to patronize people who grow "our" beans. The problems of coffee production are reconfigured, twisted around into potential assets for consumers, so that now we can feel good about how much we are helping out by drinking coffee. Our "daily dose," however, is not something the article presents as ever a source of any problems to begin with. The article concludes with the smug assertion that large, conventional roasters feel threatened by eco-labels, and proclaims that "consumers will vote with their wallets not only for a tasty cup of java, but for forest health, decent working conditions, and the return of warblers to their backyards in the spring."⁷

Cultivating Consumer Desire for Sustainable Coffee

How exactly to get consumers to behave according to the tenets of the sustainable coffee movement's ideals remains a contentious issue. Rice and Ward view the crux of the situation as how to successfully harness market expansion to fit the aims of sustainability. They do not ask if the current increase in consumption is favorable, but seek to capitalize on it in order to promote eco-coffee: "The question is how continued market expansion can be harnessed to promote forest conservation."⁸ The sustainable coffee movement sees its educational aims as fundamentally an advertising and marketing project.

David Griswold of Sustainable Harvest thinks of the social and environmental conditions of coffee growing as "ideas" that can readily be purchased by consumers if properly commodified by skillful ad professionals:

There is also the idea of a more healthy, less chemical growing system. And there is the idea of saving biodiversity and bird habitat, and creating more oxygen from having more trees. If the right marketing team gets behind these ideas, it will surely influence consumers.⁹

In Griswold's world, the way to raise awareness about profoundly political and social questions is to make them into an asset and then to sell the solution to willing buyers. Naturally, all that is needed in such a situation is the right marketing team that can properly take ideas and present them as commodities. Griswold is not alone in this view; the preface to the *First Sustainable Coffee Congress Proceedings* mentions proudly that "already we see the marketplace responding with a number of coffees that draw upon the issue of shade as a sales tactic,"¹⁰ a development clearly presented as favorable.

What happens when serious environmental, social, and political problems arise out of the production of a major commodity such as coffee,

and are reconfigured into exploitable assets by the very industry that created them? The functions and connections of production, the wide variety of meanings that can arise out of consumption, and the increased sophistication of marketing are capable of absorbing criticism directed towards them and changing it to further boost their own advantage. The complexity of an attitude that sees environmental growing practices as a marketing strategy in an industry as powerful as coffee is troubling. More ominous yet is the degree to which apparent ironies are viewed as self-evident truths in the sustainable coffee discourse. Michael Saxenian of Conservation International displays a twisted logic that needs to be taken seriously because of how commonly it is espoused throughout this movement:

The coffee industry faces a tremendous opportunity... they can turn new consumer awareness about the environment into marketing advantage by ensuring that their product is grown in an ecologically and socially sustainable manner.¹¹

The attitude evident in Griswold and Saxenian's strategies is easily interpreted as opportunistic. After all, they both seem very excited about the potential profitability of sustainable coffee. It is tempting to cynically dismiss them as profit-hungry. The lucrative nature of eco-products surely influences small roaster's decisions when they try out new marketing angles. Susie Spindler of the SCAA believes that the sustainable coffee movement focuses disproportionately on the question of how to profit from sustainability issues, and points out that the bird/shade grown labels comprise a niche market with a considerable profit margin.¹²

However, the focus on harnessing consumer awareness for sustainable coffee production cannot be reduced simply to a profiteering urge. Evident in the discourse is a deep belief that buying power is an effective way of "voting"

and of changing the means of production. The fervency and the hope with which this movement pursues consumer interest displays a deep faith in effecting change through buying power. This focus is dangerous for larger reasons than the possibility that someone may exploit it to their own benefit. The far more troubling repercussion of a consumer focus is that it avoids tackling coffee production in other ways, because its solution is the foundation of the problems it seeks to solve: "buy more."

No one in this movement takes the position of calling for reduced consumption of coffee, a move that could arguably slow the trend towards pressures for higher yields. From a narrow, isolated perspective, buying shade coffee is better than buying sun coffee. But the creation of such a duality obfuscates the larger picture, in which we still remain the consumers who help out the Third World by buying its products. Korten derides this common argument that

rich countries best help poor countries by increasing their own consumption to increase demand for the exports of poor countries... they maintain that there is no moral or practical basis for reducing the consumption of the rich to relieve the deprivation of the poor.¹³

How has such an inversion come to dominate the agenda of environmentalists concerned with Latin American coffee production? As was discussed in Chapter Three, the sustainable coffee discourse emerged out of beliefs in developmentalism and market ideologies that support the current relations between poor producing countries and wealthy consuming countries. The movement's implicit acceptance and espousal of consumer choice as effective political action illustrates that it accepts the present channels and levels of consumption within American society.

The Sustainable Coffee Movement's Focus on Labeling and Certification

While the sustainable coffee discourse focuses intensely on the minutiae of different systems, it is more fruitful to analyze why certification is held in such high regard to begin with. Since this movement only conceives of American activism as possible through consumer choice, certification is the central issue of importance. If labels are inconsistent or false, the entire movement effectively falls apart, since it seeks to establish credibility exclusively through furnishing a certain type of product. In this case the product is not just coffee but its attendant "ideas" -- biodiversity conservation and shade production.

Many seminars, papers, and working groups within the sustainable coffee movement have focused exclusively on how to most effectively certify and label coffee. Such emphasis is to some degree understandable. In order to actually change coffee production methods, a system of measuring cultivation practices, processing techniques, and labor aspects is necessary to quantify changes and to set standards. Additionally, the considerable differences between various emphases must be sorted out: fair trade practices, for example, have stricter labor and distribution standards than environmental certifications, which differ greatly amongst each other in regards to pesticide use, canopy cover, and other considerations. (See Appendix B for a summary of certification criteria.)

All of these categories, whether organic, bird-friendly, shade grown, or ECO-OK, were created with the intent of influencing consumer choices; they are consequences of a consumer-oriented strategy. Certification is only one route out of many others that this movement could have chosen to change coffee production. A different approach could have been to change tariffs on

importing chemically sprayed coffee beans, or to work for the banning of toxic pesticide export to Latin America, for example. Instead, certification is presented as the only possible strategy for ensuring the expansion of sustainable coffee production. Whom does certification benefit? What do these categories signify? How does it function in creating the view Americans have of their place within the dynamic of coffee production, commodity exchange, and consumption?

Rice and Ward believe that “explicit criteria... could provide a powerful market force” because they serve to “ensure consumer confidence” that the purchased coffee products are proven to have been produced in a consistent and environmentally friendly manner.¹⁴ Elizabeth Skinner similarly regards certification as the ticket towards consumer awareness and by implication, consumer activism. She assumes that seals of certification are nothing short of declarations of truth that will immediately be recognized as such in supermarket aisles: “What is going to make shade coffee more than a marketing fad is education and proof that shade coffee does what it says it does. Where is the proof? Certification.”¹⁵ The Rainforest Alliance’s Conservation Agriculture Program also presents the connection between certification and beneficial farming practices as self-evident: “Through the certification of environmentally sound agricultural crops, the ECO-OK and Better Banana Projects transform social and environmental conditions in tropical agriculture.”¹⁶

Rather than rendering the real labor and conditions of coffee as a crop and as a commodity more visible, however, certification instead packages an array of meanings into a more complex product. Certified sustainable coffee functions as a commodity on two levels: as a beverage, and as a symbol of ideals that have been supported by the consumer. Rather than explaining the

real connections of labor and production behind the commodification of coffee, certification further fetishizes coffee by having these relations incorporated into the end product as a purchasable asset the consumer can feel good about. Arjun Appadurai sees the commodification of information about products as a distinctly contemporary phenomenon, possible only because of the lack of visibility of connections between producers and consumers:

Knowledge *about* commodities is itself increasingly commoditized... It is only with increased social, technical, and conceptual differentiation that what we may call a *traffic in criteria* concerning things develops. That is, only in the latter situation does the buying and selling of expertise regarding the technical, social, or aesthetic appropriateness of commodities become widespread.¹⁷

Whether a consumer-oriented strategy will succeed is debated infrequently in this movement. The sustainable coffee discourse appears less concerned with the actual results of their strategies than with the fact that they should succeed. Such a moralizing attitude of self righteousness pervades the discourse. A Coffee Congress speaker asserted that

Coffee consumers and traders must recognize and support traditional coffee systems by offering peasant producers substantially higher than normal prices, and by financing their conservation to ecologically sustainable certified production.¹⁸

Are consumers, en masse, really going to insist on bearing the financial burden of certifying small coffee farms once they are properly educated about the dangers of technified coffee? In an ideal world, they "should." But proclamations such as this fail to take into account the context of consumption in American society. It is fundamentally one where the relations between production, exchange, and consumption are hidden. The

function of the market is characterized by this obfuscation; the lack of consumer interest in the origins of their food purchases is structural. If more than a handful of consumer activists simply do not care where their purchases come from, it points to contemporary characteristics of market relations rather than to the collective unwillingness of the bulk of coffee drinkers.

Notwithstanding the sustainable coffee discourse's emphasis on education and certification as effective means of enlisting consumer support for its goals, several activists in this movement appear to understand the limits of eco-certification's potential for mass appeal. But rather than de-emphasizing their focus on consumer behavior, they narrow their strategies down to those coffee drinkers most likely to respond to certification. Russell Greenberg summarizes the views of the SMBC's Certification Criteria Working Group: "When shade management is fully incorporated into Organic Certification using a graded classification system, then these coffees can be promoted to the larger potential markets concerned with such issues as bird conservation."¹⁹ As a researcher at one of this country's most visible bird-oriented organizations, Greenberg strongly believes that birders make up a larger segment of the American population than seems plausible. He often asserts that bird criteria would carry more weight for consumers than organic labeling. This seems unlikely, given the ongoing increase in popularity of organically grown produce in American stores. It is doubtful that bird conservation could command the same amount of customer loyalty, since it is a more specific issue and does not directly affect the health of consumers, a major motivational force in choosing to buy organic foods.

Regardless of whether Greenberg is wrong or right regarding the numbers of birders, his focus on targeting them as consumers illustrates a

strategy that locates the highest potential with those consumers with the most money. At the First Sustainable Coffee Congress, he gave a speech that called for a focus on the consumer power of birders: "bird people are an economically powerful and demographically relevant force in the coffee market place."²⁰ He continues to emphasize their critical importance by highlighting birders' overall financial power relative to other Americans: they have post-graduate degrees, are environmentally concerned, travel abroad, and have annual incomes above the average American.²¹ Greenberg presents this profile as a stroke of luck, ideally used to further sustainable coffee production. By conceiving of the role of Northerners in sustainable coffee production exclusively as consumers, and by focusing on certification as the way to educate people about coffee production, the sustainable coffee movement has arrived at a curious strategy.

How do you try to change production and trade channels of the world's most traded commodity after oil? The sustainable coffee movement's answer lies with rich baby boomers: they will save us from biodiversity loss and indigenous poverty. It is well-off birders in their niche market who will be setting coffee production back on the right track. The sustainable coffee movement has arrived at this stunning conclusion as a result of its uncritical acceptance of the dominant conservation and market ideologies. Rich people's buying habits are represented as an acceptable nexus for locating environmental change.

Besides the silliness and tunnel-like vision of this strategy, it avoids entirely the question of how these people became rich. It is likely that many of them work in professions that indirectly profit from the uneven balance of power between Latin America and the United States. Even more probable is that these baby boomers are stockholders in companies that exploit Latin

American workers. The espresso machines, cars, and sundry gadgets of bird-loving yuppies may have been produced in maquiladoras on the US/Mexico border. These obvious ironies and crucial economic and political links are ignored by the sustainable coffee discourse. This movement ultimately wants to have it all: gourmet coffee, privileged meaningful consumption, and the status quo. I deduct from Greenberg's recommendations that an ideal development in his view would be that wealthy consumers buy certified shade-grown coffee, and "save the world" in this way, while the American masses drink Colombian sun-grown Folgers while working at car repair shops and in office buildings. It goes without saying that such a future is neither sustainable nor environmentally sound, and does not engage itself with any of the problems it seeks to ameliorate.

David Griswold, the owner of Sustainable Harvest who bought out Thanksgiving's share this year, is even more explicit than Russell Greenberg about the potential of yuppies in the sustainable coffee movement:

Generally, as people get older, they become more concerned with issues that they ignored when they were 17-years-old (sic)... they realize the importance of leaving behind a healthy planet, with clean soils and streams, for the next generation... They drink fewer cups of coffee, but the coffee they do drink is better quality and more expensive. As growers face choices today of converting coffee land from shade varieties to technified sun coffee, we should tell them now about these market trends.²²

Griswold is firmly entrenched in a worldview that sees consumption as fundamentally positive. It takes only a few intuitive steps to arrive at the above strategy of using yuppie tastes to boost a certain product rife with meanings. The sustainable coffee movement thus operates within categories and frames of meaning that make sense within a narrow context. But their recommendations exist within larger global and national relations that shed

harsh light on these strategies. What will happen if baby boomers do respond to this trend? They will go to the store and choose whatever meaning they want to consume that day- organic, bird friendly, etc. Their experience in making buying decisions will have been engineered in the same way as all other marketing trends within the rise of specialty coffee in the United States.²³ Certified coffee will simply function as a newly created marketing niche, as a new product. The meanings consumed are simply different from those that feature, for example, flavors or estate labeling. Such purchases cannot change coffee production in any meaningful way. For every person who can afford to buy \$11/pound Audubon coffee, many others will not be able to afford it and will buy a can of sun-grown coffee. Relying on the rich people within a consuming country to bring about justice for workers and environmental protection is a complete inversion of the problems with the solution.

What is Obscured By a Focus on Certification?

The sustainable coffee movement's exclusive focus on certification results in programs that seek to expand agricultural areas operating under its guidelines. Environmental certification especially (rather than fair trade) obscures the social and political contexts of export agriculture. Is it sustainable to have vast tracts of land certified as ECO-O.K. in countries that no longer have enough land for growing crops for domestic consumption?

The case of banana certification illustrates the flawed nature of the privileging of certification without attendant emphasis on political and economic facets of production. The ECO-O.K. program "has certified 20% of Costa Rica's banana production, including all of Chiquita's farms in Costa

Rica.”²⁴ These banana plantations may now be polluting rivers to a lesser extent, but they are not socially or environmentally sustainable in the long term. Inherent to the production cycles of bananas is a seasonal reduction in the labor force at the end of the harvest, and workers are left to find arable land elsewhere, often in protected areas, to grow subsistence crops.²⁵ Coffee certified as environmentally sustainable often has the same consequence for the workers. Much of the work is seasonal, and depends on a large itinerant work force left to fend for itself in the off-season. These are important events that certification ignores. The ECO-O.K. program, according to the Rainforest Alliance’s web page, is successfully converting huge plantations of bananas to certified status:

At present, nearly 20% of banana production in Costa Rica and 50% in Panama has been awarded certification-- over 20,000 hectares-- and farms in other countries are making the necessary improvements to achieve certification.²⁶

If all banana plantations are certified, their production situation will still not be sustainable. Certification alone changes little since it does not adequately address the larger context of export agriculture. Instead, it replicates fundamentally exploitive commodity production with a “green” spin. Vandermeer and Perfecto point out that “in some areas of Central America one can almost draw a map of where the patches of good soils are located, simply by mapping the banana plantations.”²⁷ When the best cropland is reserved for export production, whether bananas or coffee, a highly unstable political situation is the result. Latin America’s poverty will not be alleviated by certification programs that focus on site-specific changes in production rather than on structural and political roots of the complexities of coffee production and trade. A certified organic or shade-grown coffee

renders situations such as land distribution less visible, because it highlights the individual product's growing method and not the social, political or economic context of production.

Jennings and Jennings point out that organic certification of produce in the United States evolved because of a concern about consumer health. In an article on the links between pesticides, farmworker health, and consumer habits, they chart the constructed invisibility of the connections between Latino fieldworkers and affluent consumers-- exactly the target group of the sustainable coffee discourse. They ask:

Isn't it time that a new mapping be required to make more explicit the social ecology of modern agriculture, where instead of labeling warnings geared solely toward consumer habits we warn against the health and moral consequences of larger production practices as well?²⁸

This question was directed towards the silence of consumers and agribusiness regarding the routine poisoning of farmworkers in the United States. Yet when applied to coffee cultivation and growing practices, this angle of approach brings to light further omissions within the sustainable coffee movement's emphasis on certification. It makes visible that this movement's focus on the certification of environmentally friendly coffee leaves out an engagement with the conditions on technified plantations. The result is that the consumer can feel good about buying a certified product, yet does not feel bad for buying an uncertified one. Labeling becomes a sort of special interest in the market; you can choose to buy something certified or something not certified. Missing from such a scenario is an overall acknowledgment or articulated connection between all types of coffee available.

Jennings and Jennings describe farmworker activists' ideas to post signs in grocery stores that explicitly state level of genetic engineering, pesticide use,

and working conditions on farms.²⁹ Such posting would never occur, because it is in the interest of consumers, retailers, and agribusiness to keep the conditions of production invisible. The sustainable coffee movement's emphasis on certification claims to connect the consumer with the conditions of production by selling a product labeled in a specific way. However, certification functions to simply advertise the merit of certain coffees while leaving others out of the picture entirely. No one, after all, is proposing to oversee or legislate the posting of growing practices on all coffees. Such a move would be testament to an engagement with and concern about coffee production as a whole. The sustainable coffee movement focuses only on shade grown production systems in order to maintain biodiversity, and is uninterested in coffee production's other facets unless they tangibly relate to conservation. Truly a "special interest," the sustainable coffee discourse places value over and over again on the correct labeling of the coffee they want to promote. Their certification of eco-coffee functions in similar ways to the organic food labelings described by Jennings and Jennings. Entirely unconcerned about the labels on sun-grown coffee products, the sustainable coffee movement wants to sell their certified products rather than to revamp the coffee industry overall.

Coffee's Meanings for Consumers: A Brief History

The new emphasis on the environmental dimensions of coffee production must be explored within a context of the more general significance and roles of coffee in importing countries. An in-depth review of the social and cultural significance of coffee as a beverage is obviously beyond the scope of this work. Yet a mini tour of the importance of coffee in

European and U.S. culture is useful in furthering an understanding of coffee's more recent emerging role as a vehicle for expressing environmental and social concerns.

Coffee consumption in Europe and the United States has always carried with it an array of class, status, and other marks of distinction. In surveying some of the roles and meanings ascribed to the consumption of coffee in various contexts of time and place, the relevance or irrelevance of the sustainable coffee movement necessarily emerges. Rather than simply being a beverage that we enjoy, as the sustainable coffee discourse represents it, coffee consumption has played and continues to occupy a significant role in Western society. To focus only on the site of production of coffee misses the connection between growing practices in Latin America and the degree to which consuming countries are shaped by their habit.

It is not an exaggeration to declare that European and American society were significantly shaped by their relation to coffee. While Western European governments were benefiting from importing coffee from their colonies, coffee house in Europe were a central venue for intellectual, political, and artistic exchanges.³⁰ They served as meeting places, and the caffeine rush from the beverage made possible an altogether different sort of interaction than would result from meetings in pubs. In the United States and in Industrial Revolution era Great Britain, coffee became a way to get workers to stick to hourly labor in factories, and played a key role in the temperance movement.³¹

The Tontine coffee house in New York was the first site of the New York Stock Exchange.³² Coffee consumption has since then always carried with it a host of class markers and distinctions in the United States. Coffee became a fixture in offices in the twentieth century; the eight-hour workday

evolved in tandem with coffee breaks as a way to stimulate employee productivity. The evolution of canned ground coffee and home coffee makers were marketed towards housewives in the 1950s as a way to boost energy and quality of life.³³ The development of a mass culture of espresso-based milky sweet drinks in the last decade allows consumers to feel worldly and learned as they choose from a vast array of origins, syrups, and flavorings. For two or three dollars, latte junkies purchase a variety of meanings: a busy, sophisticated lifestyle, a prepackaged association with European culture.

Since the first Starbucks opened in 1971, gourmet coffee has spread all over the United States and continues its expansion into the middle-class bastion of the shopping mall. Ultimately the aspects of coffee that consumers purchase are associations and cultural meanings. Although an appreciation for “good coffee” is the most-touted reason for this expanded market, it is not the real reason for its increase in popularity. While many coffee shops purchase high-grade beans, all too often the method of preparation utterly ruins the end product. The addition of milk, sugar, and various sprinkles ubiquitous in coffee bars further obscure the actual taste of the beverage. “Quality” is an idea that American consumers like, but the price they pay for gourmet beans is lost in the course of preparation.³⁴ According to Susie Spindler of the SCAA, Americans have completely missed an appreciation for good coffee by consistently masking its flavor with syrups, sugar, and cream. This occurrence illustrates that it is the connotations derived from drinking certain coffees that are significant, not the actual beverage itself. Its social meaning is the reason for coffee’s popularity. What does this tell us about the sustainable coffee movement? How does this “traffic in meanings” operate within its discourse?

Two facets of the discourse, the focus on “quality” and the attention

directed towards the origins of the concern about eco-coffee, can be examined within the context of the production of meanings. "Quality," despite the fact that most coffee drinkers mask the taste of their drinks, is viewed by the sustainable coffee movement as the pinnacle of worth. In all discussions about shade versus sun coffee, it is mentioned that shade coffee tastes better. Consumers deserve the best, of course, so high quality is touted repeatedly as a prime characteristic of shade-grown coffee. The concept of quality functions in two ways: it allows consumers to feel distinguished by their good taste, and lets roasters and retailers advertise their product towards this consumer urge.

The purveyors of coffee themselves, of course, had a large part in creating this consumer need in the first place through advertising. American consumers are so often complemented by marketers' insisting that "you deserve the best" that quality becomes a real perceived need on the part of the consumer. David Griswold is the foremost enthusiast about the "quality" of shade grown coffee. He asserts that "Coffee drinkers are becoming used to high quality... The increase in coffee consumption of specialty coffee is due to better flavor."³⁵ The concept of quality is approached by Griswold as a static characteristic, inherently good. Therefore he sees the rise in popularity of specialty coffee as something that simply occurred: it tastes better! Rather than realizing that myriad forces are at work in the evolution of our present coffee consumption-scape, Griswold sees quality as a transcendental signifier and coffee drinkers as all of a sudden naturally becoming attuned to it.

In a similarly essentialist manner, sustainable coffee promoters alternately point to roasters and consumers exclusively to explain the rise in interest in eco-friendly coffee. Rather than grasping the existence of a dynamic between marketers and consumers, and the relation between them as the impetus for new products and concepts, buyers and sellers are represented as

occupying entirely separate spheres of existence. A pamphlet circulated by the Seattle Audubon Society sees the situation as pretty simple.

Until now, coffee importers, roasters, and retailers haven't had a reason to track whether their product is grown in the shade or in the sun. But due to consumer awareness of the impact of technified coffee on the environment, people are starting to ask for shade coffee.³⁶

This statement creates a reality that accomplishes several things at once. Importers, roasters, and retailers are let off the hook of responsible business practices because, it is implied, only consumers are responsible for making them accountable for delivering a product produced in non-destructive ways. Further, in naming "consumer awareness" as the location change must come from, people in the United States are once again represented as acting politically only within the consumer realm. Overall, this representation shields the coffee industry from blame, renders growers entirely invisible, and totally misses how changes in the production of commodities occur.

Other sustainable coffee promoters see roasters as the instigators of the new movement for environmentally friendly coffee. Paul Katzeff of Thanksgiving Coffee Company explains the origins of the phenomenon in this way:

The demand for the new product first identified as "certified organic" and later as "shade grown" or "bird friendly," was created by a few coffee roasters who, regardless of their reasons, were looking for a point of difference, an advantage over their competitors, a niche to dominate.³⁷

Katzeff sees roasters, and their desire for competitive advantage, as the impetus for certified coffees, while Audubon claims consumer demand created a new product. Which is true? More importantly, does one have to be

true and the other false? The question I want to keep in mind is not whether there is an answer, but why this dichotomy was created to begin with. What does it illustrate about the sustainable coffee discourse's representation of the role of consumers in this movement?

How Did Consumerism Become the Solution to the Problem of Technification?

Consumer activism has clearly become the solution to counteract the trends in coffee production. But why? It is not enough to analyze the workings of this trend; its overall context must be examined.³⁸ What causes the sustainable coffee movement to seek change in the arena of consumption? What are the paradigms, value systems, and implicit beliefs that make such a solution seem plausible? And why is this happening now?

The sustainable coffee discourse is full of references to the needs and desires of consumers. Coffee drinkers are portrayed as people who have the desire for a meaningful experience while buying products. Elizabeth Skinner succinctly displays this view: "Consumers are primed to welcome an initiative such as conservation coffee because they want to do something positive for the environment... It is something they can feel good about."³⁹ People are represented as consumers once again, as such their political concerns are portrayed as finding expression exclusively through consumer choice. This discourse naturalizes consumer activism by routinely representing environmental concern in connection with buying power. Rather than pointing to North Americans' concern about biodiversity in itself, this concern is articulated entirely within the realm of consumption.

An article surveying the Bay Area's sustainable coffee roasters

represents the desire for political change as inextricably linked to consumption. One roaster asserted that “people want meaningful consuming,” another one that “this is right environmentally, and it’s right emotionally.”⁴⁰ What is meant by “meaningful consuming?” When someone buys shade-grown coffee, they are satisfying their desire to ‘save the forest’ by purchasing a product. The emotional experience of the consumer is presented by these roasters as a wonderful thing; an expression of self and an articulation of beliefs. The quasi-religious zeal with which consumption is represented as a political and spiritual act serves to enshrine the consumer in a saintly halo, rather than making explicit the skewed balance of power in favor of Northern retailers and coffee drinkers. Far from articulating the chain of production and its inequities, the sustainable coffee movement further rewards consumerism by placing political action entirely within its realm. On one level, shade grown coffee is “right” environmentally and, perhaps emotionally. But such a pronouncement does not address the pertinent fact that we are still consuming a crop for which we set the prices and now want to determine the growing conditions. In other words, this New-Age speak perpetuates the inequality between coffee workers and consumers while pretending to be doing something good.

Should we ever feel entirely good about drinking coffee? Do we even need, or rightfully and inherently deserve this export and luxury crop that ultimately takes more indigenous people away from subsistence farming? Finally, we as consumers have somewhat elaborately decided to feel good about all this-- a creation of our own country’s environmentalists acting on their own interests. We are not asking ourselves to give up a thing; sustainable coffee is constructed to be a win-win situation. What does it mean when we say it works? For whom? For what? The sustainable coffee

movement has engineered a large project that ultimately assumes that it is our rightful place to consume more, not less. By making consumption the solution to a complex situation, it becomes ethically and politically correct to consume more.

How does the sustainable coffee discourse represent coffee growers within its focus on consumption?

In this chapter I have explored the workings and effects of a consumer-oriented strategy for causing social and political change. The sustainable coffee movement's representation of people in importing countries is squarely within their role as consumers, and marginalizes other forms of action that do not occur within the marketplace. The discourse's configuration of human agency not only privileges the "consume to save" narrative, however. An equally relevant consequence of the discourse's exclusive focus is also its representation of coffee workers in Latin America. In this section I focus on how the sustainable coffee movement's attention to certification and meaningful consumption creates certain narratives and descriptions of coffee producers.

The discourse romanticizes indigenous producers in a manner that appropriates their cultures into a favorable context. Coffee workers are not given the opportunity to speak for themselves in this movement, but are represented according to the interests and goals of the promoters of sustainable coffee. The discourse displays producers as archetypal "traditional" people in its marketing strategy that aims to make Northern consumers feel connected to producers in a way meaningful to us. The sustainable coffee discourse mentions the role of producers only when it is

strategically expedient to do so. In its marketing strategies, the movement focuses on producers only when it furthers the primary goal of pushing for consumer awareness of biodiversity- friendly coffee.

The consumer focus of this movement causes it to articulate a view of producers that represents them in a way palatable to Northern coffee drinkers. Indigenous coffee workers are represented as hard-working, diligent, and eager to produce for a section of the U.S. market that votes for conservation in the marketplace. Indigenous peasants especially are presented as in dire need of certification programs and U.S. NGO-spearheaded biodiversity initiatives. This movement ignores political rebellions, worker strikes on large plantations, and the social history of the crop. Indigenous producers are romanticized for Northern consumers, who in turn feel a paternalistic connection to growers by purchasing their product. The Montana Coffee Traders' newsletter on "sustainability" represents coffee growers in a condescending way that reconfigures the roasters and the US consumers as philanthropic do-gooders when they buy and drink coffee from Latin America:

In some places farmers will walk five miles with a bag of coffee cherry to be milled. Entire villages participate in the sorting and grading of the coffee beans, sitting around mats heaped with beans. Rumbling, ancient trucks follow treacherous mountain routes loaded with the coffee harvest headed for the mill.... The issues are complex, they vary from region to region. Each community's needs are different- there are no easy answers.⁴¹

This description, targeted towards coffee consumers, exoticizes the production of coffee. It commodifies the "otherness" of a comparatively low-tech situation. Further, the actual interests of producers are rendered unspeakable, dismissed by being labeled "complex" and left at that. Communities are described as having "needs" rather than goals, interests, or

demands of those who set prices for and purchase their coffee. The cumulative effect of Coffee Traders' description of producers is the privileging of their own conceptualization of the lives of rural producers. These coffee growers are represented as fascinating and as occupying a different world from ours. They exist in the discourse as concepts rather than as people with actual lives, interests, and goals. George Collier points out that "we integrate individual agency into our understanding of peasant communities" only when we cease to "view them in simplistic terms-- as either the passive victims of the state or as 'noble savages' who can reinvigorate modern society."⁴² The sustainable coffee discourse fails on both accounts: it represents peasants solely in terms of collective identity, and views them in simplistic terms that construct indigenous producers as "traditional" keepers of our highly valued biodiversity in (south-of-the-border) agricultural practice. Thus the sustainable coffee movement is not interested in the lives of peasants per se. It mentions them only when it further serves the consumers' desire to help Latin American producers. In order to create a sympathetic reaction in consumers, the discourse presents peasants in essentialized terms that omit complexity and any individual agency on the part of producers themselves.

This construction of peasants is another concept packaged for consumption. It operates in similar ways to the consumption of certified conservation coffees: the realm of production is commodified and becomes an asset available for purchase. In an article on the consumption of "rurality" in products from Vermont, Clare Hinrichs observes that

Although much recent theoretical work on consumption has focused on obvious 'cultural goods,' such as art, music, and fashion, *rurality* is as much a commodity produced for, marketed to, and consumed by different class fractions. Rurality

as an object for consumption, then, rests on both material instances and symbolic understandings of landscape, tradition, and place.⁴³

This analysis holds true for the sustainable coffee discourse's use of its representations of coffee producers in furthering new coffee products. The view of producers carries a symbolic value for consumers, who are effectively purchasing an assemblage of meanings and representations of producers, all carefully designed by roasters and retailers. The sustainable coffee discourse further commodifies "all manifestations of difference" by using them as a marketing ploy, as a quality of the product that increases its value as an item available for sale.⁴⁴

Why do romanticized representations of producers carry weight with U.S. consumers? Perhaps it is due to our often-mentioned cultural malaise of individualism and our separation from tangible, community centered ways of living. Americans romanticize what they see as "authentic," and Latin American coffee growers may play the role of connecting the alienated U.S. consumer to something solid and direct such as the growers of our coffee beans. Regardless of the psychological currency that the romanticizing of indigenous societies has for Northern consumers, the phenomenon is by no means limited to the sustainable coffee discourse. This movement simply taps into white America's mainstream portrayal of indigenous people, especially of rainforest inhabitants, in order to strengthen its own cause.⁴⁵

Some interesting projects emerge as a result of a romanticized view of Latin American peasant lives. One such project is part of the "Global Service Corps," a program designed and run by the San Francisco-based Earth Island Institute. For a fee of \$1700, volunteers from the United States can work at Finca La Bella, a model environmental coffee farm in Costa Rica:

About a third of the land, which contains virgin cloud forest, has been left untouched for wildlife. Global Service Corps has sent two volunteers to the Finca La Bella project since the beginning of the year, and we hope to continue to send more. The volunteers helped with planting, picking coffee, and other day-to-day tasks required to operate a farm.⁴⁶

Whom does such a project ultimately benefit? With whose interests in mind was it created? What does it signify when U.S. volunteers pay to have the experience of picking environmentally-friendly coffee? The Finca La Bella project is the apex of the "consumption of rurality." It allows concerned environmentalists from the United States to experience firsthand a sanitized, prepackaged coffee farm designed according to their own priorities.

Finca La Bella is an actual place, but it has much in common with the sustainable coffee movement's representation of peasants for consumer palatability and the purchase of meanings. It is in this context that coffee producers are represented in the discourse. But producers are mentioned only when they occupy a marketable place; when the interests of coffee growers do not help increase consumer interest, they are dropped in the sustainable coffee discourse. By analyzing the times when the discourse omits mention of the producers' situation, a more complete picture of its representation of growers emerges.

In its focus on meaningful consumption, it is not always expedient for the movement to tout indigenous rights. As was discussed in Chapter Two, biodiversity and migratory bird habitat conservation are the primary goals of the sustainable coffee movement. This focus is in line with the widespread privileging of environmental preservation that often marginalizes the complexity of the very reasons for the destruction of nature. Social issues, such as fair pay, humane working conditions, and pesticide poisoning of

workers take a back seat to habitat preservation. The links and overlaps between social conditions and environmental degradation are not central to this movement. This characteristic is common in environmental movements lead by white U.S. activists.⁴⁷

Michael Saxenian of Conservation International explicates why shade coffee has more of a chance at success than fair trade coffee with consumers. Conservation is a more popular concept than indigenous rights, and Saxenian has no qualms about that:

More sobering for those with a purely fair trade approach is the experience of Cultural Survival, one of the pioneers in non-timber forest product marketing. Cultural Survival concluded that conservation sells, indigenous rights do not, implying that the US market is more attuned to environmental messages than social ones, and that it may be difficult to generate broad-based demand through [a] purely social marketing message without the addition of a substantial ecological component.⁴⁸

What is “sobering” for Saxenian is the folly of attempting to market products that emphasize indigenous rights alone. He tacitly accepts this condition of the market. What does it mean that “indigenous rights do not sell”? Environmental and social aspects of production are represented in Saxenian’s narrative as “marketing messages,” as commodities in themselves. Rather than searching for the implications of this situation and trying to articulate them, he is interested only in how various “messages” can be best tailored to engineer mass demand for a product. The sustainable coffee discourse pays attention to indigenous farmers and other growers’ experiences only when such a focus favors their overall marketing strategy. This movement is content with leaving by the wayside any mention of the social context of production if it doesn’t help sell eco-coffee to consumers.

Elizabeth Skinner of the Rainforest Alliance articulates exactly this

conclusion in her characteristically blunt manner: "Consumers who may or may not be concerned about their health, or the health of workers in Central America, will see the connection between birds and coffee."⁴⁹ It is unlikely that the bird/coffee connection will ever gain widespread visibility with consumers. But the significance of Skinner's proclamation is that she puts out front what others tactfully hedge around: that the situation of coffee growers is important as a marketing strategy only if represented as environmentally beneficial or otherwise relevant to the "messages" desired by Northern consumers.

The amount of space alone that most literature on this topic gives to representing coffee growers is tiny compared to the advertisement of the benefits of shade cover. Chris Wille's article "Clouds in the Coffee" in *E* magazine is an extended description of the importance of biodiversity in coffee farms. Yet only one line at the very beginning mentions coffee workers: "morning commuters" drinking coffee on their way to work, Wille asserts, would be "surprised to learn that it was most likely picked by Central American workers earning less than a dollar a day in pesticide-intensive, high-output factory farms."⁵⁰ Maybe coffee drinkers would be surprised to learn this. But it isn't Wille who is going to tell them about labor conditions, since he is not interested in them either. The article continues for another thirteen paragraphs that are dedicated exclusively to birds and biodiversity; the situation of the pickers is not mentioned again.

The sustainable coffee movement, in its focus on mobilizing consumer interest, regards coffee producers as alternately an effective marketing tool and as an aspect of production ultimately secondary in importance to the environmental conditions of coffee plantations.

What are the effects of the sustainable coffee discourse's consumer-oriented strategy on how we, as Northern consumers, view ourselves? What functions does this solution serve, whether deliberate or unintentional?

A near-exclusive focus on the arena of consumption as the obvious site for instigating social, political, and environmental change has complex repercussions. I have discussed the effects of the sustainable coffee discourse's privileging of consumer activism on its representations of possibilities for political action in importing countries, and the place it has allotted to coffee growers in its vision of possibilities for change. In this section, I analyze the implications that a consumption-oriented strategy has on consumer psychology and behavior. Two direct consequences arise out of the sustainable coffee movement's strategy: new niches of consumer desire are created, causing an expansion of marketable goods, rather than a reconfiguration of the commodity chain; and the conventional reasons why people buy certain products remain fundamentally unchanged, as price and quality remain the ultimate markers of a "good" product. A less tangible but equally important effect of the focus on consumption of coffee drinkers is the broadening of consumerism as a way of experiencing the world and as a way of living in it. The sustainable coffee discourse conceptually expands the role of consumption in the lives of coffee drinkers by attaching additional roles to consumption that were previously left to other fields of action or experience.

The prominence of foods that have their social or environmental condition of production used as an asset is relatively recent. Politics have always been a part of the chain of production, but these facets were usually hidden. Consumers choosing one brand of sugar, or bananas, or coffee over

another made their decisions based on price, quality, or appearance. The contemporary popularity of organic or local produce, for example, is new in that these characteristics now perform as marketing assets, rather than simply being the norm or a quality preferred by specific shoppers. I am not arguing against the production of crops in an environmentally beneficial or socially equitable manner; rather, I am troubled by how the new interest in these qualities function in the dynamics of consumption. It appears that they operate as additional commodified assets rather than signifying a profound structural change. A cursory glance at the cars parked at a local organic/natural food store reveal that the domain of the conscientious consumer overlaps substantially with relative wealth. It is easy to spend a hundred dollars on environmentally and socially correct products at this store. The role that such purchases play for wealthy consumers is that they allow them (us) to feel politically active while remaining entrenched in the conventional consumer realm.

In gauging the rise in popularity of environmental products, Timothy Luke writes that "these marginal benefits are counterbalanced by the substantial costs of remaining structurally invested in thoroughly consumerist forms of economy and culture."⁵¹ This appears to be how sustainable coffee has entered the market. It does not challenge mass forms of production, but sits side-by-side with conventional coffee, as a gourmet and specialty product that offers more to the consumer. It is not presented as a critique of the cans emblazoned with Juan Valdez 100% Colombian (sun and pesticide-grown!) but as a fundamentally different product. This observation is acknowledged in the discourse. Paul Katzeff of Thanksgiving Coffee states that "The new criteria focus on social, environmental, and fair trade issues. Such new criteria have created, in essence, a demand for a new product."⁵²

Katzeff does not see this demand for a new product as troubling, perhaps because he supplies the market with such a product. Yet it signals that sustainable coffee, in working within the conventions of the market, has failed in mounting an effective critique of conventional coffee. If a consumer looks at conventional and shade-grown side by side on the shelf, and sees only the former as a political statement and the latter as "regular," then the movement has failed to effectively educate its target political base (consumers) with its goals.

What happens when eco-consumerism exists as a part of mass consumer culture, rather than as a criticism of it? Michael Saxenian of Conservation International celebrates that in "the Giant [supermarket] down the street from [his] house, that organics and conventional products can be sold side by side."⁵³ His acceptance alone of the term 'conventional' depoliticizes the production history of those products. Linguistically, sun-grown, high-input factory farms function as the unmarked item, as the norm. The marked item, sustainable coffee, has its point of difference operating as a marketable asset referring only to itself and not to an engagement with the problems of 'conventional' coffee. The existence of 'sustainable' coffee on the shelf alongside 'regular' coffee does not bode well for significant change in the industry. It may be doing more harm than good, since it functions as a distraction for those people actually concerned with the conditions of production. When political change is funneled into the arena of consumption in this way, it diverts attention and potential focus away from fundamental change:

Therefore, green consumerism, which allegedly began as a campaign to subvert or reduce mass marketing, now ironically assists the definition and expansion of mass marketing by producing new kinds of consumer desire.⁵⁴

Sustainable coffee has entered the marketplace as a “win-win” concept: consumers get to feel good, new microroasters are doing a brisk business, and indigenous cooperatives are getting solar bean dryers and more credit. Yet the position of sustainable coffee in supermarkets as the primary way for Northerners to “get involved” has consequences. The expansion rather than contraction of the idea of consumerism is one of them. A second effect of the marketing strategy for sustainable coffee is that it has to play by the rules of the market.

A new product necessarily has to offer more to the consumer, if one wants to effect change by getting consumers to buy it over another one. Otherwise, it will not be bought and the movement will fail in its only strategy. Hence, price and quality are still allotted a premier position in the discourse of the sustainable coffee movement. Its promoters know that they have to please consumers without offending them: “Green positioning can be a decisive point of differentiation, but only if the price and quality of the product are reasonably competitive with the alternatives.”⁵⁵ It is presented as unreasonable to offer a product that is too expensive, even if that is the only way producers can be adequately compensated and the only way in which production costs on the environment are truly internalized. Quality, too, must be superior to regular coffee, because “consumers deserve the best.” The sustainable coffee movement sees these conditions of the market as realities to become acclimated to and to define their strategies around. They do not question whether the cheap food policy that externalizes harmful production costs is one of the factors that led to the current wave of technification of coffee. Neither do they judge the consumer’s demand (seen as a right) to have quality as the most prominent aspect of a product. The discourse is so

entrenched in its own consumerist worldview that it does not question the arrogance of the American belief that we have a moral right to buy what we want, when we want it, and that it must be cheap and good. Rice and Ward conclude that

It would be unrealistic to assume that new environmental criteria, no matter how compelling, will be sufficient to 'pull' particular coffees through the market irrespective of price and quality considerations.⁵⁶

Equally unrealistic, and more seriously so, is the attempt to fundamentally change the course of coffee production without taking a hard look at the conditions of the market and scrutinizing them as a source of many of the problems this movement seeks to address. The sustainable coffee movement uncritically accepts the context of consumer society, then tries to effect change in this sphere by submitting to its rules. In its politeness and acceptance, it wants to cause fundamental change without confronting the conditions that led, in part, to the trends in coffee technification.

The focus on consumer activism in the sustainable coffee movement also affects coffee drinkers in less direct, but equally important ways. The act of consumption now includes the experience of feeling that one is participating in political action, and it allows consumers to feel a connection or solidarity with producers. As was discussed earlier, the discourse of sustainable coffee promotion reconfigures coffee growers as romantic, hardworking people whose lives we can improve by buying their coffee. This emotional aspect of purchasing eco-coffee also extends to the consumer's feeling of connection to (and stewardship of) the areas where coffee is grown. It becomes a way of experiencing other places through consumption. In his article on "Yuppie Coffees," William Roseberry sees the popularity of origin-

labeled coffees as a consumption of a simulacra of other places, as a way of feeling connected to the world.⁵⁷ Sustainable coffee operates in a similar way, in that it allows consumers to feel that they are connected to a fragile, dwindling habitat that their purchase is playing a part in preserving.

Consumerism now includes all these facets, and has increasingly become a way of experiencing the world. The sustainable coffee movement's failure to address change in non-consumptive realms is testimony to how powerful a force consumerism has become. It is difficult to articulate other modes of action since buying things "has increasingly evolved into a way of moving through the world."⁵⁸ Consumerism has such a privileged status in U.S. society that it naturally becomes the solution to problems. This is the case even in movements that seek to address changes in situations created in part by consumer culture, such as the sustainable coffee movement. Coffee was imported to Latin America for the benefit of importing countries two hundred years ago, and now has been reconfigured as an asset to Latin America's people and landscape. The sustainable coffee movement cannot see outside of its own vantage point in order to call for fundamental changes that would necessarily affect the conditions of consumption just as much as those of production.

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Chapter Five

Conclusion

In the previous three chapters the sustainable coffee movement was analyzed in terms of three concepts operating in its discourse: biodiversity, development, and consumerism. These narratives shape the way problems and situations are represented, and influence the solutions designed to halt coffee technification. I have critiqued the movement's mission and philosophy, and pointed out the significance of its omission of relevant social and political factors that influence coffee production systems. In this chapter, I evaluate the sustainable coffee movement in terms of its industry context and gauge its potential in reaching its stated goal of becoming the standard form of coffee production.

Trends and Characteristics of the Specialty Coffee Industry

It is highly unlikely that the sustainable coffee movement would have arisen out of the coffee production and consumption situation of the 1980s. Only in the last ten years has gourmet coffee become an integral part of urban, increasingly suburban, and rural retail life. Coffee shops are ubiquitous now, and one can find gourmet fresh roasted coffee and espresso drinks in drive through shacks, malls, and even gas stations. While coffee has been a fixture of American life for over a century, the last decade has seen a steady rise in the popularity of expensive gourmet coffee, ground fresh before preparation. Sales have grown at a steady clip of 7% to 10% a year. The trend towards whole bean coffees has caused the major roasters in this country- Maxwell

House, Folgers, and other canned supermarket coffees- to try to undercut each other in price in order to keep their market share.¹ Their falling popularity has resulted in the closure of large industrial roasting facilities in U.S. cities, and micro-roasters are proliferating. New gourmet coffee shops serving espresso drinks often realize profits of \$100,000 in their first year of operation.

Whereas ten years ago the norm was stale, large factory-roasted and ground coffee, often Colombian and a blend of different grade beans, now coffee drinkers no longer choose between only two options of decaf and regular. Consumers now pick different origins and blends of coffees, as well as different roasts. Without this increased awareness of and attention paid to the geographical origins of coffee and their method of preparation, the sustainable coffee movement could never have materialized. It would not be an exaggeration to state that this movement is a consequence or an outgrowth of the rise of specialty coffee, rather than a parallel trend. Since this movement focuses on promoting sustainable gourmet coffee, it must position itself in relation to trends within the specialty coffee industry of which it effectively is a part.

Since sustainable coffee is marketed and promoted in the same venues as other whole bean coffees, the character of this industry greatly affects its visibility. The values and priorities of retailers, marketers, and distributors can help or ruin this movement. In a report on "Ethics in the Specialty Coffee Industry," Morty Milner ranked the situations which members of the industry thought would constitute the most serious ethical breaches. Out of the thirteen situations, the one viewed as the "most damaging" overall was "selling products deliberately mislabeled." The literally last concern was "purchasing products without regard to their effect upon local environments."²

These results do not bode well for the sustainable coffee movement, since it has chosen consumption as the site for effecting change. If the people involved directly in the business of specialty coffee are relatively unconcerned with their impact on coffee-growing areas, they will have little incentive to order, stock, sell, or promote sustainable coffee. Other factors will be more important to them, and they will not market towards an eco-niche. If the products are not sold in stores, consumers will, overall, respond to this lack of visibility by buying regular gourmet coffee. Milner concluded that

people in our industry are first concerned with consumer issues, then business and competitive factors, and lastly the broader and more long term issues of the environment and people living in third world coffee producing countries.³

The specialty coffee industry is after all, an industry, and a successful one at that. Out of it evolved an environmental and social movement, but the priorities of the industry remain to furnish a high-quality product to consumers willing to purchase it along with its attendant meanings and associations. Some of these meanings may include a concern for coffee-growing regions, but they were never the impetus for coffee consumption, and now function as an afterthought, additional asset, or value to a fraction of the industry and of the market. It is thus an uphill struggle for the sustainable coffee movement to gain visibility and gather momentum. Their priorities are fundamentally different from the specialty coffee industry's overall character and reason for existence.

A recent blurb in *Business Week* was the first time the sustainable coffee movement gained recognition in a national business magazine. This "Greenwatch" section, taking up one-quarter of page 6, focuses on the National Audubon Society's new Cafe Audubon, and gives a brief summary

of the connection between birds and coffee. "But it's a slog getting attention," the author writes, and then quotes an Audubon representative: "We are up against the Starbucks of the world."⁴ As the industry giant, Starbucks' marketing strategy, priorities, and successes set the standard for the entire industry. A closer look at Starbucks' operations is necessary to an understanding of the obstacles faced by the sustainable coffee movement.

Starbucks has crafted a self-image of sophistication and hip urban culture. At the same time, it references European coffee bars and their social milieu. Images abound at Starbucks: mugs are emblazoned with famous paintings, and the "siren logo" was created to give the look and feel of 1960s hippie culture.⁵ An article in *Print* gets to the heart of the matter:

Starbucks's design strategy exemplifies the flexibility of current marketing language, which indiscriminately draws from the vast storehouse of cultural achievements to create attributes for commercial enterprises. Starbucks is the perfect simulacrum, its identity program rife with recycled images and sounds.⁶

How welcome could sustainable coffee conceivably be in a Starbucks? There are interesting similarities in their marketing strategies. The sustainable coffee movement advertises its products by making the environmental and social conditions of production into a marketable asset. Like Starbucks products, whose popularity relies on associated cultural references and meanings, sustainable coffee also works as a simulacrum, though of a different sort. While the experience purchased by sustainable coffee customers is a beneficial association with the environmental and social conditions of coffee growing areas, the connotations and meanings of Starbucks are sophistication, style, and the commodified feeling of being "cultured." These are fundamentally different experiences and associations,

but could theoretically be motivated in the same target groups.

It still seems highly improbable that sustainable coffee would become a strategy within Starbucks for two main reasons. Primarily, why would Starbucks want to change its already successful marketing strategy? Emphasizing sustainability in coffee production would constitute a major change, rather than superficial new spin, on their customer image. While sustainable coffee also relies on a "traffic in meanings," those meanings could confuse customers who may be understandably overwhelmed by a barrage of associations. Further, Starbucks already bills itself as socially conscious, in offering health care to part-time workers and in its advertisement of generous donations to CARE. An display of social and environmental concern for the political conscience of consumers has already been crafted by this company.

The overall image that Starbucks portrays, however, is fundamentally at odds with the reality of this powerful company. Rather than offering a personal, local, individual space to relax or gather with friends, Starbucks designs its stores for maximum customer turnover. These tensions between Starbucks' self-proclaimed image and its tangibly impersonal feel is noticeable immediately upon walking into one of its stores. New stores are often purposely sited across the street or on the same block as locally established coffee houses-- with the aim, and often success, of driving the smaller stores out of business. This disjunction between Starbucks's purported image and its reality is not its greatest fault, however.

The most significant hypocrisy of Starbucks is also the very reason why it would not support sustainable coffee: Starbucks profits from its imports of coffee grown by exploited workers. While the company gave \$100,000 in 1994 to projects benefiting coffee-growing communities, it purchases beans from Guatemalan farms that pay workers 2 cents per pound of coffee harvested.⁷

Activists from the United States/Guatemala Labor Education Project urged Starbucks to adopt a code of conduct for working conditions on plantations, where “virtual slave conditions prevail.”⁸ Starbucks finally agreed to meet with US/GLEP after the organization mounted a national boycott and picketing of Starbucks stores in over 20 U.S. cities. The result was that Starbucks issued a vaguely worded code of conduct, but took no steps to trace the origins of its coffee or enforce its code. A Starbucks spokeswoman also claimed that the company uses shade grown beans, but this assertion is untruthful. Starbucks does not trace its coffee in this way, and nor has it even begun an evaluation of the social or environmental conditions of coffee plantations in Guatemala that they purchase their beans from. Starbucks is the number one U.S. importer of Guatemalan coffee.⁹

These events are now a few years past, and Starbucks is doing good business. It is unlikely that they would voluntarily bring up issues of production again unless forced to do so. The relative invisibility of sustainable coffee in the public eye when compared to the power of Starbucks makes it even more improbable that Starbucks will jump on the sustainability bandwagon of its own accord.

But Starbucks is only one coffee company, even if it is the most powerful. The sustainable coffee movement may succeed in gaining visibility with other national or regional chains, or within local retailers on an individual basis. In Missoula, organic coffee is available wherever Montana Coffee Traders beans are sold, and the Good Food Store and Butterfly Herbs both sell certified shade-grown coffee. The latter also sells Equal Exchange fair trade coffee, but (significantly) does not label it as such.

The Global Regulatory Apparatus: ICO Priorities

Besides the importance of an analysis of the specialty coffee industry context, which the sustainable coffee movement must necessarily take into account, overall trends within coffee must be addressed. Just as the sustainable coffee movement exists within a larger context of the specialty coffee industry, this industry in turn operates under a global regulatory and promotional body: the International Coffee Organization. It was the ICO that created a quota system to begin with, and the ICO who disbanded it in 1989. These changes deeply affected the production, exchange, consumption, and retailing of coffee around the globe. An analysis of the ICO's states objectives and current programs elucidates the global context that the sustainable coffee movement currently operates under.

The ICO is an international, intergovernmental body, whose membership consists of representatives from 44 exporting and 18 importing countries. It creates and administers the International Coffee Agreement, the latest of which was implemented in late 1994. The general objectives of the ICA address international cooperation, to facilitate dialogue on pricing, and to aid in the expansion of coffee trade worldwide. Currently, a Promotion Fund is in effect to expand consumption in Russia and China.¹⁰ Nowhere in its web page is there a mention of the concept of sustainability. That concern has not been addressed by the ICO-- not even superficially, as it has been by the Specialty Coffee Association of America.

The ICO's general description of its purpose is understandably vague. Yet in its descriptions of coffee production in individual countries, its stance on technification is more clear. In an overview of the Venezuelan coffee situation, the pursuit of higher productivity is consistently presented as top priority. Details are lacking, however, in a description of a National Coffee

Fund policy:

Current policies include a project for the renovation of 25,000 hectares of coffee land in the cultivated areas of river basins at medium and high altitudes. In addition to substantial output increases, which may exceed one million bags, the project will assist in the prevention of soil erosion and improve the quality of neighboring water courses.¹¹

What is meant by a renovation? Are the soil erosion measures and watercourse restoration integral parts of this project? Are these farms shaded or sun? These details are not mentioned, they are not seen as important. Innovation, higher output, and (lip service to?) environmental protection are the motivating factors behind this representation of Venezuelan policies.

The ICO's description of Costa Rican coffee production further underscores the bias inherent in its seemingly neutral choice of words:

The Coffee Institute of Costa Rica (ICAFFE), responsible for the supervision of the sector, has carried out a programme of research and development that has allowed producers to take advantage of the most modern and **suitable** (sic) methods of production. Thus, with limits to the land available, the normal method of production is from dwarf, closely spaced trees with a recommended density of 7,000 per hectare.¹²

Again, exactly what type of R & D was carried out by ICAFFE? Why is "suitable" highlighted yet left unexplained? Costa Rica has the highest rate of deforestation in Central America. Yet the ICO treats it as a given that because there are limits to available land for coffee production, production must be in a farming system that is monocrop and, judging from their description, full-sun. Since the ICO's mission is in large part to increase global coffee production, it places high yields at the forefront of its considerations. This is evident in its representation of coffee production in both Venezuela and Costa Rica.

How does this affect the sustainable coffee movement's potential for success in halting further technification? At the very least, the obstacles in its path are great, since increased output is valued so highly and to the exclusion of other considerations by the ICO. Coupled with the marketing focus of the specialty coffee industry in the United States, ICO priorities towards increasing coffee plantation output amount to a formidable barrier to the sustainable coffee movement.

The Sustainable Coffee Movement's Obstacles on the Producing Side

The sustainable coffee movement concentrates on encouraging existing shade-grown and organic coffee farms by making credit available for farmers, by paying in part for certification, and by offering premiums. No in-depth study has ever focused on the effects of such programs on the producers, however. This is understandable, considering that this movement is relatively new. The fair trade coffee company Equal Exchange has not studied the effects of their programs on the communities they work with-- a task that they correctly point out would take years to complete.¹³ The shade grown certification system is still in its infancy, so no qualitative study of its degree of impact has been conducted. Yet after a thorough study of the literature available on coffee production and biodiversity, several significant difficulties come into view.

Elizabeth Skinner of the Rainforest Alliance believes that conservation coffee "should not be limited to five percent of the coffee trade. It should become the standard in the coffee trade."¹⁴ In previous chapters I have focused on the impossibility of sustainable coffee becoming the standard since it seeks to coexist with, rather than directly address, the problems within

already technified plantations. But the unlikelihood of sustainable coffee ever reaching a high percentage of market share is due to other more concrete reasons as well. Sustainable coffee does not offer adequate incentives for farmers, especially those with larger farms who have more money and can afford to technify and reap profits from much higher yields. Technification of coffee requires more capital than shade-grown or organic, because fertilizers and pesticides need to be purchased. Yet it is tempting for those farmers who can afford it: labor is reduced by up to 50%, and production increased by 100% or more.¹⁵ Further, the sustainable coffee movement does not take into account the amount of labor, time, and energy that shade coffee farming entails.

The time, resources, and attention to detail that organic farming requires are not presently reflected in the premiums offered to farmers who practice these techniques. Susie Spindler asserts that the environmental coffee movement has "failed to take into account the labor intensiveness of a high-quality organic coffee."¹⁶ What she means by this is that the sustainable coffee movement, on the whole, operates without an adequate knowledge or view of the economic situation of coffee growing. According to Spindler, the labor required to successfully grow very good organic coffee is immense. There are no economic incentives out there for this. People are not willing to spend \$5 on a cup of coffee. Organic will never comprise more than 10% to 20% of the world's coffee, she asserted, because there is not enough labor out there for it. If more coffee was organic, there would be a worldwide shortage, since organic/shade grown plantations have less output than technified ones. Given the debt structure of these countries (discussed in Chapter 3), the situation further restricts sustainable coffee.

Some small farmers who have been contacted by importers do benefit

from the premiums they receive. Yet these incentives are not enough to convince farmers who are thinking about technification to resist the pressures to modernize, because the state and the IMF require it. A solution that omits these problems cannot succeed. This lack of engagement with global and national economic policies is testimony to the unwillingness of the sustainable coffee movement to conceptualize Latin American rural conditions in terms other than those that serve their interest and are in their area of expertise.

The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center's Birds and Coffee web page asserts that "because of its high profitability per unit area compared to raising corn or beef, coffee growing has been seen as a way for small landowners to obtain cash with relatively little investment."¹⁷ A general statement like this one illustrates the top-down approach that has shaped the sustainable coffee discourse. Rather than asking rural producers how Northerners can help, this movement has stepped into the arena of small-scale coffee production in order to save biodiversity. In closing, I briefly present one case study of a rural community where coffee is grown in contrast to the SMBC's statement. What emerges is that producers' realities often do not fit the categories that the sustainable coffee movement sees as inherent to coffee production.

In *Maya Saints and Souls*, John Watanabe chronicles his ethnographical study of the village of Chimbal in Guatemala in the 1980s. His work was a follow up to a similar study conducted in the 1930s in the same village. Both he and the anthropologist whose work inspired him lived in Chimbal for a number of years, and Watanabe was continually attuned to the possibility of misinterpretation.

He describes how fertilizers have made it possible for many villagers to stay in Chimbal: the population had grown, but all available land was already

claimed by village families. Due to the availability of fertilizer, higher yields were obtained, and villagers could feed themselves by farming smaller plots of land in corn and beans. If the villagers had no access to fertilizer, they would have to leave Chimal, a situation the overwhelming majority of them did not want to face. Fertilizer did not function as a perfect cure-all in Chimal, and the long-term effects of its use there have not been gauged. They will surely be detrimental to the long-term productivity of the land and to the health of the farmers. Yet the role fertilizer occupies in their lives is one the sustainable coffee discourse does not address. This movement sees fertilizer as negative because of its ecological and health consequences (and rightly so) but it avoids addressing the incentives that cause farmers, such as those in Chimal, to use fertilizer. Watanabe explains that

To keep their shrinking plots of land viable, Chimaltecos must find a way to buy the fertilizer they need. This cash comes almost exclusively from coffee that they grow on their own land or pick for wages on Ladino-owned plantations outside Chimal.... like the use of fertilizer, cash-cropping and wage labor in coffee have enabled marginal landholders to survive.¹⁸

How ironic that the profits from small-scale indigenous coffee farming are used to buy fertilizer! Surely this is a situation the sustainable coffee movement does not anticipate. Further, Chimaltecos try to minimize their involvement in markets and wage labor outside their village, and participate in them only in order to be able to stay in Chimal.¹⁹ The complexities that emerge out of this specific situation point to a different landscape of choices and priorities than is addressed by the sustainable coffee movement's focus on shade versus sun, development initiatives, and certification. Reality is not split among those lines in Chimal.

Watanabe also found, contrary to the SMBC's statement that coffee is

an easy investment, that “except for those who already own coffee groves, few can realistically afford to become growers.”²⁰ Suitable coffee growing land in and around Chimbal became expensive when coffee prices soared in the 1970s. While the sustainable coffee movement emphasizes the method of production in already existing indigenously-operated coffee farms, situations such as the one in Chimbal do not fit into its framework. Small landowners are not a uniform lot, yet the Smithsonian’s rendition of their situation is that they can convert to pasture, grow corn, or grow coffee. This avoids engagement with any complexity. Coffee cannot be grown in all areas; some land may be better for corn. The farmer may need corn to eat in a few months and may not be able to afford to start a coffee plantation, which takes money and the ability to survive the five to seven years before the trees bear fruit.

Further, the belief that poverty will be alleviated only through increased market participation is a twisted fiction. It not only discredits the very real effects of exploitive land use for the benefit of a wealthy few in Latin America, it also marginalizes other representations of value and meaning that do not see market participation as the foundation for a better life. The sustainable coffee discourse’s silences about the direct relevance of the 1994 Zapatista Rebellion for biodiversity and small-scale farming indicates that this movement is unwilling to conceive of Latin American rural struggle in terms other than those deemed valuable by Northern institutions. David Korten points out that

Ironically, the argument that the well-being of the poor depends on economic growth comes mainly from professional development workers, economists, financiers, corporation heads, and others.... When the poor speak for themselves, they more often talk of secure rights to the land and waters on which they live and from which they obtain their livelihoods.²¹

My aim is not to further represent “the poor” in any other essential way, or to say that land tenure rather than economic integration is really what the coffee farmers of Latin America want. The choices faced by small-scale coffee growers in Latin America necessarily vary. In comparing just a single study of one town with the SMBC’s representation of the decisions faced by small landholders, it becomes apparent that the approach of the sustainable coffee movement has not concentrated enough on understanding the choices and obstacles faced by farmers.

Some of the sustainable coffee partnerships may succeed, and I honestly wish them well. Yet this movement’s *raison d’être* is a concern for biodiversity first and foremost. The efforts to conserve Latin American biodiversity through ‘making it work’ in the global economy function to keep all involved parties in the same political and power relations by subsuming biodiversity into the categories and terms of value created by Northern institutions. It tries to effect change through development initiatives and marketing, but has not asked the most fundamental question of itself: “What is our authority in this?”

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Appendix A

Sustainable Coffee Movement Organizations

Coffee Kids

Nonprofit charity and social justice organization. Providence, Rhode Island. Researches, funds, and implements community development projects in coffee growing regions. Projects include microloans, community banking, solar coffee bean dryers, and water purification systems.

Conservation International

Nonprofit environmental organization. Washington, D.C. Works for sustainable development by building markets for tropical nontimber forest products, educating producers, and forging partnerships. Developing criteria for sustainable coffee production.

Equal Exchange

Importer and roaster. Canton, Massachusetts. Operates on fair trade principles: guarantees a minimum floor price, buys from democratically-run cooperatives, provides credit, and encourages sustainable cultivation practices.

Montana Coffee Traders

Importer and roaster. Whitefish, Montana. Buys and sells shade-grown and organic, as well as conventionally grown, coffee from around the world. Believes in fair trade principles and sustainability, prefers to buy from small-scale operations.

Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA)

International association of farmers and producers. Establishes, maintains, and regulates criteria related to growing and processing coffee without the use of fertilizers or pesticides.

Rainforest Alliance

Nonprofit environmental advocacy organization. New York, New York. Created and administers the Conservation Agriculture Program and the ECO-O.K. certification program (bananas and coffee) in Latin America, specifically Costa Rica.

Royal Blue Organics

Importer and roaster. Eugene, Oregon. Buys coffee exclusively from the ISMAM (*Indigenas de la Sierra Madre de Motozintla*) cooperative in Chiapas, Mexico. Operates on fair trade principles, coffee is shade-grown and organic. Donates 2% of profits to Pesticide Action Network.

Seattle Audubon Society

Nonprofit environmental advocacy organization, with a focus on bird issues. Seattle, Washington. Coordinates the "Northwest Shade Coffee Campaign," an association of roasters, retailers and importers, with a focus on consumer education and ensuring supplies of shade-grown coffee.

Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center

Research and environmental advocacy wing of the Smithsonian. Washington, D.C. Sponsored and hosted the First Sustainable Coffee Congress in 1996, funds and publishes research on scientific, economic, and political aspects of coffee production in Latin America.

Specialty Coffee Association of America

Nonprofit trade group. Long Beach, California. Promotes coffee consumption, quality, and education to the industry. Incorporated sustainability of coffee production into its mission statement.

Sustainable Harvest Coffee Company

Coffee importer. Emeryville, California. Imports certified organic and shade grown estate coffee from small farms in Latin America. Gives credit to farmers for the purchase of staple foods before harvest time.

Thanksgiving Coffee Company

Small coffee roaster and importer. Fort Bragg, California. Buys shade-grown and organic coffee directly from Latin American producer cooperatives at 40% to 75% above the market price. Donates 15 cents of every package sold to a village banking program administered by Coffee Kids.

Appendix B

Certification Criteria and Characteristics*

Sustainable Coffee

- **certification system:** graded system, third party certification.
- **current status:** drawing board.
- **who pays:** broker or roaster.
- **shade management:** graded system based on gestalt, top status to traditional polyculture and rustic farms.
- **agrochemical use:** graded system. Organic receives highest rating. Allowance for emergency use. Clear prohibition of many chemicals.
- **soil conservation:** shade trees required. Avoid planting on steep slopes. Terracing with living fences. Use of mulch from farm by-products.
- **resources for small-scale producers:** Provide affordable credit, access to information, training and markets. Development of diversified products associated with coffee shade.
- **treatment of workers:** Fair wages and adequate living conditions. Restriction on child labor.
- **fair and stable trade:** Provide stable and fair price, at least covering cost of sustainable production.

Organic Coffee

- **certification system:** third-party certification based on measurable standards. Allowance for transitional standards.
- **current status:** established.
- **who pays:** producer.
- **shade management:** diverse shade recommended.
- **agrochemical use:** agrochemicals prohibited with some allowance for emergency use of some compounds. Recognition of transitional status.
- **soil conservation:** terracing or contours used. Use of ground cover plantings and mulch. Prohibition against clean-weeding.
- **resources for small-scale producers:** socio-economic improvement.
- **treatment of workers:** space must be provided for organic subsistence gardens.
- **fair and stable trade:** premiums paid for certified organic and transitional coffees.

* from Robert A. Rice, Ashley M. Harris, and Jennifer McLean, eds., Proceedings: First Sustainable Coffee Congress (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, 1997), Table 1.

Fair Trade Coffee

- **certification system:** inclusion of farms on international registry by third party. Separate standards for roasters.
- **current status:** established.
- **who pays:** licensed roaster.
- **shade management:** N/A
- **agrochemical use:** discouraged.
- **soil conservation:** N/A
- **resources for small-scale producers:** access to credit, training, and markets through long-term relations with brokers and roasters.
- **treatment of workers:** N/A (coffee is produced by democratically run cooperatives)
- **fair and stable trade:** established formula pegged to world coffee price.

ECO-O.K. Coffee

- **certification system:** third-party certification by environmental NGO.
- **current status:** transitional.
- **who pays:** producer
- **shade management:** minimum quantified standards for tree density, basal area, and diversity.
- **agrochemical use:** reduction. Reliance on IPM. Some compounds prohibited. Chemical fertilizers allowed except near streams.
- **soil conservation:** Soil measures recommended. Living barriers on steep slopes.
- **resources for small-scale producers:** N/A
- **treatment of workers:** wages consistent with national agricultural legislation. Waste management and sanitation systems. Housing provided should be "dignified."
- **fair and stable trade:** premium for minimum certification.

Thanksgiving Coffee

- **certification system:** roaster verification. Point system.
- **current status:** transitional.
- **who pays:** ?
- **shade management:** high point value for coffee grown under natural forest.
- **agrochemical use:** maximum points for certified organic. Points for non-certified organic.
- **soil conservation:** points for use of shade.
- **resources for small-scale producers:** points for small farms.
- **treatment of workers:** points for social benefits programs.
- **fair and stable trade:** points for fair trade coffee.

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